NATION

Delhi mandates PNG for commercial LPG users

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BUSINESS

Govt urges digital booking of LPG, shuns panic buying

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SPORTS

Rizvi powers DC to 6-wicket win over MI

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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India denies payment issues on Iranian oil ship going to China

Iranian LPG tanker docks in M'luur; Govt says normal for ships to detour

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

India said on Saturday that there are no payment issues with Iran for crude imports and that refiners continue to source oil from the country, as well as from a wide range of global suppliers.

The comments come as an Indian LPG tanker carrying 46,650 tonnes or roughly half a day's cooking gas supply has successfully crossed the war-hit Strait of Hormuz, while another vessel from Iran has reached a port in Mangaluru with LPG.

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas on X dismissed reports that an oil tanker carrying Iranian crude had rerouted mid-voyage from its previously indicated destination of India, to China, saying the claims overlooked standard industry practice where cargoes can change destination during transit based on trade optimisation and operational flexibility.

The Ministry said it was "factually incorrect" that the Aframax cargo tanker Ping Shun was diverted from its previously indicated destination of Vadinar in Gujarat to China due to payment hurdles. It said diversions are common in global oil trade, as bills of lading often indicate tentative discharge ports and cargoes may be rerouted mid-voyage for operational and commercial reasons.

This would have been the first time India has bought oil form Iran since 2019 when the US imposed sanctions on Tehran.

"India imports crude oil from 40+ countries, with companies having full flexibility to source oil from different sources and geographies based on commercial considerations," it said.

Separately, an LPG cargo from Iran has arrived at Mangalore and is being discharged, according to the statement.

"LPG vessel Sea Bird carrying around 44,000 tonnes of Iranian LPG berthed at Mangalore, India on April 2 and is currently discharging," the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas said on X.

Historically, India was a major buyer of Iranian crude oil. —*PTI*

>>>*More on Pgs 2, 4, 5 6, 7*

As the 7th India flagged LPG tanker crosses the Strait of Hormuz, 17 more are in queue
WEST ASIA WAR
DAY-36
PYXIS PIONEER
SINGAPORE

B'luru rickshaws struggle amid LPG shortage, shut bunks

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

Auto-rickshaw drivers in Bengaluru are facing major problems with gas stations shutting down amid a serious dearth of LPG in the City.

A considerable number of LPG bunks have been forced to close due to supply shortages. Stations have remained closed in Seshadripuram, Mysuru Road and JC Road areas for nearly a week now.

In some places, bunks have even been barricaded and completely closed. Only 10 to 15 are currently operational at present in the City.

The crisis worsened after LPG prices rose from around Rs 60 to Rs 105 in private bunks.

To make matters worse, those operating LPG-run autos cannot switch to petrol. On average, one litre of LPG gives a mileage of 20 to 30 kilometres, making it essential for daily operations. However, with gas unavailable, many drivers are out of work.

The supply remains limited in Super Gas stations that reportedly import fuel from Russia. Meanwhile, auto drivers have appealed to the government to ensure a steady supply of LPG. —*Agencies*

UNSC vote on opening Hormuz postponed

DUBAI, 4 APRIL

Bahrain, which holds the presidency of the UN Security Council this month, postponed the vote on a resolution aimed at authorising "all defensive means necessary" to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. The proposal had been watered down significantly because of opposition from permanent members Russia and China.

The vote will now take place next week – although the dates are yet to be announced.

The Bahrain-sponsored draft resolution would have authorised defensive measures — not offensive action that Gulf nations and the US initially supported — to ensure vessels can safely transit the waterway where one-fifth of the world's oil typically passes. The postponement indicates that Russia and China have signalled that they would have vetoed the resolution. —*PTI*

Trump says Iran has 48hrs to make a deal or face hell

WASHINGTON, 4 APRIL

US President Donald Trump on Saturday re-upped a previous 6 April deadline for Iran to open up the Strait Hormuz or face devastating consequences.

"Remember when I gave Iran ten days to make a deal or open up the Hormuz Strait?" Trump wrote on Truth Social. "Time is running out — 48 hours before all Hell will reign down on them. Glory be to GOD!"

The President made his comment as he remained at the White House on Saturday morning. The Trump administration hasn't made an official comment on the US fighter jet shot down in Iran, even as rescue operations were underway.

Trump has previously given deadlines to Iran and other countries such as Russia only to later extend them, or ignore it altogether.

He had previously extended the deadline for Iran to make a deal or face consequences, claiming that negotiations were underway. Iran has said it has zero trust in the negotiating process, but indicated that it was willing to meet US officials in Islamabad, provided there were concrete measure to end the war comprehensively.

Meanwhile, strikes continued across West Asia, as the Iran threatened a crucial waterway on the Red Sea. —*PTI*

>>>*More on Page 6*

Stalin condemns FCRA Bill as draconian

NAGERCOIL, 4 APRIL

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin called the proposed FCRA Amendment Bill 2026 "draconian" and alleged it targeted minorities, especially Christian organisations. Addressing a rally before the 23 April Assembly polls, Stalin criticised the Centre's foreign policy failures, citing attacks on fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy and accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi of neglecting Tamil Nadu fishermen. He criticised the Bill for threatening institutions built with foreign funds, claiming it would impact SCs, STs, and the rural poor. Stalin urged its withdrawal, calling the law an attack on religious freedom and social service, and questioned whether allies supported it. —*PTI*

>>>*MORE ON PAGE 3*

Great Indian Bustard population rises to 76

JAIPUR, 4 APRIL

Three chicks of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard have been successfully hatched using artificial insemination at breeding centres in Rajasthan's Jaisalmer district, raising the captive population to 76. Two chicks were born at Sudashri Godawan Breeding Centre and one at Ramdevra centre, which now houses 52 birds, while Sudashri has 24. Officials said the technique is proving vital as it enables breeding when natural reproduction is difficult. The species, once widespread across Rajasthan, Gujarat and parts of Pakistan, has declined sharply due to power line collisions, poaching and habitat loss. Authorities are closely monitoring the chicks and preparing them for eventual release, offering renewed hope for conservation of the species. —*PTI*

People gather around a well in Maharashtra's Nashik after a car fell into it on Friday. Nine members of a family, including six children, were killed. —*PTI*

9 of family killed as car plunges into well in Nashik district

NASHIK, 4 APRIL

Nine members of a family, including six children, were killed when their car fell into an open well in Maharashtra's Nashik district, police said on Saturday.

The accident occurred in the Shivaji Nagar area of Dindori town around 10 pm on Friday, an official said.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis expressed grief over the deaths of children, and said that he has ordered an immediate safety audit of open wells in public areas.

Police said the victims were returning home after attending a function at a banquet hall in the area when their car fell into a well on the roadside near the venue.

Police and emergency services arrived at the scene and retrieved the car and its occupants with the help of two cranes and swimmers around midnight.

The victims were members of the Dargude family from Indore village in Dindori taluka, the official said.

The dead are Sunil Dattu Dargude, 32, his wife Reshma, Asha Anil Dargude, 32, and six children from the family, including five girls aged between seven and 14 and an 11-year-old boy.

The bodies were brought to the government hospital in Dindori, the official said, adding that a case has been registered.

State Disaster Management Minister Girish Mahajan visited the accident spot. He said the administration has been directed to close the well, and that the government will provide an assistance of Rs 5 lakh to the kin of the deceased.

The Nashik collector has been asked to probe the incident. — *PTI*

Shashi Tharoor's gunman, driver attacked in Kerala; one held

MALAPPURAM, 4 APRIL

One person has been taken into custody after Congress MP Shashi Tharoor's gunman and driver were allegedly attacked by a five-member group at Kerala's Wandoor, police said on Saturday.

The incident occurred at Chellithode near Thiruvali in Wandoor at around 7.30pm on Friday. According to the FIR, the accused, who were travelling in two vehicles, blocked the MP's vehicle.

Police officials said the incident occurred at a Chellithode bridge roadblock while Tharoor was en route to a campaign event for Congress leader AP Anilkumar. According to the FIR, the gunman and driver were allegedly attacked while attempting to clear the obstruction.

Wandoor Police said the case has been registered based on a complaint lodged by Tharoor's gunman, Ratheesh KP. One person was taken into custody late Friday night, and the remaining four accused have been identified and will be apprehended soon, police added.

Tharoor posted on X: "He is well, and I was untouched. We carried on undaunted yesterday and concluded two more events as planned. Our ongoing programme remains unaffected". —*PTI*

>>>*More on Page 3*

- The incident occurred at a Chellithode bridge roadblock while Tharoor was en route to a campaign event. The gunman and driver were allegedly attacked while attempting to clear an obstruction.

EC suspends four cops over Suvendu nomination row

KOLKATA, 4 APRIL

The Election Commission has suspended four Kolkata Police officials and ordered disciplinary proceedings following their failure to maintain law and order during BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari's nomination filing on 2 April. Union Home Minister Amit Shah accompanied Adhikari in the controversy-ridden Bhabaniour seat, where he faced CN Mamata Banerjee.

The EC's directive, based on a recommendation from Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Agarwal, targets Deputy Commissioner Siddhartha Dutta, Officer-in-Charge Priyankar Chakraborty, Additional OC Chandi Charan Banerjee, and Sergeant Saurabh Chatterjee. The poll body called for immediate implementation of the suspension.

The incident occurred amid a BJP roadshow near Kalighat that faced opposition from TMC supporters, resulting in a tense face-off. —*PTI*

COZYING UP TO TRUMP NETAS

Ambani sought to use Epstein's connections

WASHINGTON, 4 APRIL

Reliance Chairman Anil Ambani reportedly sought to leverage sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein's purported White House connections during the early months of the Trump administration, according to newly revealed US Justice Department documents. The files show Epstein presented himself as a source with US policy insight and a connector to figures close to the Trump administration.

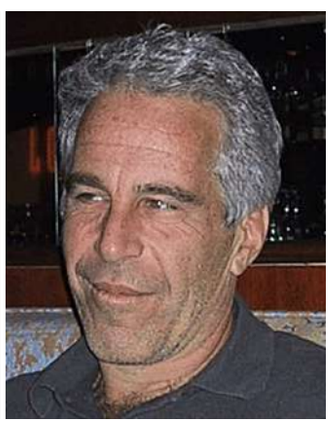
The files indicate that Ambani, interested in navigating the Trump administration's national security and economic policies, communicated with Epstein between 2017 and 2019. During this period, Epstein—portraying himself as a Washington insider—reportedly offered to introduce Ambani to key figures, including Trump strategist Steve Bannon and businessman Thomas J Barrack Jr, who chaired Trump's 2017 inaugural committee. Messages exchanged between the two men suggest that they discussed geopolitics, potential business opportunities and access to American political circles.

The communications are part of a larger trove of documents released as part of investigations into Epstein's network of global contacts among political and business elites.

Epstein, a financier with extensive ties to powerful figures around the world, was arrested in 2019 on federal charges of sex trafficking involving minors. He died later that year in a New York jail while awaiting trial.

The continuing release of documents related to his activities has repeatedly brought new attention to his connections with prominent political leaders, business figures and celebrities worldwide. —*Agencies*

>>>*More on Page 6*



Reliance MD Anil Ambani, convicted sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein — *X*

SC to hear case on women entering Sabarimala on 7 April

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

A nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court is scheduled to commence from 7 April the final hearing on petitions relating to discrimination against women at religious places, including Sabarimala Temple, and on the ambit and scope of religious freedom.

The nine-judge Constitution bench will comprise Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices BV Nagarathna, MM Sundresh, Ahsanuddin Amanullah, Aravind Kumar, Augustine George Masih, Prasanna B Varale, R Mahadevan and Joymalya Bagchi.

In September 2018, a five-judge Constitution bench, by a 4:1 majority verdict, had lifted the ban that prevented women between the age of 10 and 50 from entering the Ayyappa shrine in Kerala and held that the practice was unconstitutional. Later on 14 November, 2019, another five-judge bench referred the issue to a larger bench.

The verdict also referred issues of entry of Muslim women into mosques and dargahs and of Parsi women, married to non-Parsi men, to the holy fire place of an Agiary to the larger bench.

The court will examine the meaning of "constitutional morality," and the extent of judicial review in religious practices. It is expected to conclude by 22 April. —*PTI*

— FREEPIK

Seven-year-old electrocuted to death in Mysuru

MYSURU, 4 APRIL

A seven-year-old boy electrocuted to death in an accidental electrical mishap at his residence at Kailasapura in Mandimohalla area of the Mysuru on Friday night. According to the police, the deceased has been identified as Mohammed Ali. The tragedy took place when Mohammed Ali's father Mohammed Karim, and other of his family members were preparing for a wedding function scheduled on this Sunday in the premises of his house. Mysuru police said that boy was electrocuted to death when he was playing in his house. Mandimohalla police have registered a case and investigation in the matter is underway.—*SALAR NEWS*

Metro services extended till 2am for IPL today

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

In view of the Indian Premier League (IPL) T20 match between Royal Challengers Bengalluru and Chennai Super Kinds, in Bengaluru on 5 April, the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) has announced an extension of Metro services to facilitate late-night travel for cricket fans and commuters. As per the revised schedule, the last trains will depart from Whitefield (Kadugodi) and Bommasandra at 12.30am, while services from Challaghatta, Silk Institute, and Madavara will run until 12.45am. The final train from Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Station (Majestic) will leave at 1.30am. towards all four directions. Additionally, a late service from RV Road will operate until 2am, a statement said.-*AGENCIES*

BJP criticism driven by fear of defeat in bypolls: CM

Surjewala demands Simha's apology for remark on CM's caste

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday said the BJP's criticism of the Congress government reflects a "fear of defeat" ahead of the 9 April bypolls.

He added that the State's guarantee schemes are an investment in social commitment and inclusive development.

Speaking to reporters in Bagalkot, he expressed confidence that the Congress would win both bypoll-bound constituencies,.

"We have provided schemes for people belonging to all castes, religions, and languages. The BJP is opposing the guarantee schemes out of fear of defeat, but these guarantees are an investment that delivers social commitment. This, too, is development,"Siddaramaiah said.

"Development does not mean only roads, bridges, and buildings. It also includes providing economic and social security," he said. Referring to remarks by PM Narendra Modi and others, he said, "They (BJP leaders) have been claiming that the State will go bankrupt. However, guarantee schemes have been in force for the past three years, and till 24 March, 2026, Rs 1.31 lakh crore has been spent on them." He maintained that spending on key sectors has not been curtailed.

CM Siddaramaiah, AICC General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala —*PTI*

The bypolls were necessitated by the demise of sitting Congress MLAs Shamanur Shivashankarappa and HY Meti, who represented the Devangere South and Bagalkot constituencies respectively.

Meanwhile, Congress General Secretary and Karnataka in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala slammed BJP over alleged disparaging remarks made by former Mysuru- Kodagu MLA Pratap Simha against Siddaramaiah duirng a campaign in Bagalkot and demanded an apology.

Simha made quips about Siddaramaiah eating meat during Diwali and Ugadi and made references to "cut".

Surjewala alleged that the remarks were made to disparage Siddaramaiah, "the most senior leader of a backward community — with the sole intent of sending the message that backward classes, are seen as inferior and subservient through their Manuvaadi lens." —*PTI*

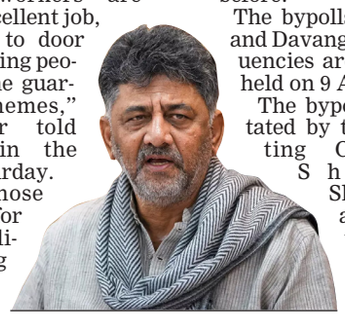
'TO WIN BY BIGGER MARGIN'

Guarantees will make BJP supporters vote for Congress: DKS

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Saturday said that the Congress' strategy of convincing people about the success of the guarantee schemes was working very well for the upcoming bypolls. He said that people who used to vote for the BJP will now support the Congress.

"Both Bagalkot and Davangere are very positive. Congress workers are doing an excellent job, going door to door and convincing people about the guarantee schemes," Shivakumar told reporters in the City on Saturday.



"Even those who voted for the BJP earlier are saying they will vote for Congress. People want the guarantees to continue and are expressing difficulties due to rising prices," he said.

The guarantee schemes include 'Shakti', 'Gruha Lakshmi', 'Gruha Jyoti', 'Yuva Nidhi' and 'Anna Bhagya'.

Expressing confidence of an improved electoral performance, he added, "There is a strong sense that we will win with a bigger margin than before."

The bypolls in the Bagalkot and Davangere South constituencies are scheduled to be held on 9 April.

The bypolls were necessitated by the demise of sitting Congress MLAs Shamanur Shivashankarappa and HY Meti of the Davangere South and Bagalkot constituencies. —*PTI*

Veerashaiva Jangamas do not fall under SC category: SC

BIDAR, 4 APRIL

The Supreme Court has dismissed a petition seeking a review of the High Court's order which had stated that the Veerashaiva Lingayat Jangama community is not the same as Beda Jangama or Budga Jangama.

The petitioner Ravindraswami, a resident of Bidar, had filed a review petition in SC against the high court ruling. The High Court in its had stating that Veerashaiva Lingayat Jangamas are not Beda Jangama or Budga Jangama.

Ravindraswami, who belonged to the Veerashaiva Lingayat community had obtained a scheduled caste (SC) certificate under Beda Jangama.

State Dalit Sangharsh Samiti (DSS) State Organizing Convenor Maruti Bauddhe welcomed the SC verdict. He said that Ravindraswami had fraudulently obtained an SC certificate.

The issuance of the caste certificate had been challenged before the Kalaburagi bench of the High Court, which subsequently cancelled Swami's caste certificate. Challenging this, Ravindraswami had approached the SC in 2025, which upheld the high court's order.

Karnataka Dalit organisations' leaders including Maruti Bauddhe, RPI (Ambedkar) state coordinator Mahesh Gornalkar and DSS leaders Arun Patel, Babu Tiger, Rajkumar Waghmare and Ashok Gaikwad also welcomed the verdict. They demanded stringent punishment against officials who issue false certificates as well as those who obtained them.

Welcoming the verdict, Rajkumar Mulabharati, state general secretary of the Karnataka SC/ST Anti-Fake Caste Certificate Struggle Committee said that if Ravindraswami had been genuinely eligible for ST status, his efforts would have had merit. Everyone in the state should abide by the order. —*Salar News*

WITH PROPERTY TAX

MCC withdraws order on motor vehicle cess

MYSURU, 4 APRIL

The Mysuru City Corporation (MCC) withdrew its decision to collect motor vehicle cess following public criticism. The MCC had announced in its recent budget that it would begin levying motor vehicle cess alongside their property tax from citizens.

MCC commissioner Syed Asif Tanveer issued the order withdrawing the collection from Saturday.

According to the notification, the cess is set at Rs 500 for four-wheelers, Rs 300 for three-wheelers, and Rs 200 for two-wheelers. The MCC will collect these charges based on the Property Identification Number (PID) for all sites within city limits.

Former mayor Shivakumar criticised the motor vehicle cess, terming it a direct assault on the poor. "Collecting cess on them is nothing but sucking the blood of the poor," he said. —*Salar News*

Police bust online racket selling fake IPL tickets

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

Bengaluru police have registered a cyber fraud case after several people were duped by a fake website selling Indian Premier League (IPL) tickets.

Fraudsters allegedly created a lookalike platform mimicking the official ticketing site of Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) during high demand for upcoming matches, including the clash against Chennai Super Kings. Electronic City Division DCP M Narayana said the fake website displayed details of matches at M Chinnaswamy Stadium to make it look genuine. —*PTI*

CONVOCATION AT BU

Former cricketer Venkatesh Prasad, music director Arjun Janya, educationist TK Narayanappa, KOA President K Govindaraju, Educationists Mohan Alva and BM Farooq were presented honorary doctorate degrees during the 5th Convocation of the Dr Manmohan Singh Bengaluru City University; Students hold up their certificates - *MOHAMMAD ASAD*

'People suffering due to Centre's foreign policy'

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday said that the government was not paying attention to an acute gas shortage amid the war in West Asia.

"There is a gas problem in the country. People are stuck in queues," Kharge told press in the City. "The government should pay attention to it, but it is not because their foreign policy is not right. We are suffering because their foreign policy is not right."

Earlier, the Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Minister, KH Muniyappa, reiterated that there is no "actual" shortage for domestic or public transport needs. Yet, auto rickshaw drivers have been seen across the City in long lines.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar blamed the BJP for the LPG shortage and demanded an apology from them.

"The LPG shortage in the country is due to the BJP," he said. —*Agencies*

CFTRI gets BIRAC-BioNEST incubation centre

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Union Minister Jitendra Singh inaugurated the BIRAC-BioNEST incubation centre at Mysuru's CFTRI on Saturday, noting that innovation and consumer demand must stay well-aligned.

The new Central Food Technology Research Institute (CFTRI) facility aims to boost food start-ups, support advanced research and scale-up food bioprocessing and biotechnology for market-ready solutions, according to a statement.

Singh said, "While starting a venture has become easier, sustaining it requires continuous value addition, market access and stronger industry linkage." The minister added that research institutions and the private sector needed deeper engagement, along with aligning innovation with consumer demand, including convenience food segments.

The new Central Food Technology Research Institute facility aims to boost food start-ups and support advanced research —*PTI*

Singh also highlighted the government's push to expand private sector participation in emerging technology areas, pointing to new funding mechanisms and institutional support frameworks aimed at accelerating research, development and innovation.

Launched by the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council, the Bioincubator Nurturing Entrepreneurship for Scaling Technologies (BioNEST) scheme supports the establishment of bio-incubators to provide infrastructure, mentorship, and networking for biotech startups. —*PTI*

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Spot-Billed Pelican and Black-Winged Stilt are spotted at Bengaluru's Hebbal Lake on Saturday. The lake has been dried up for cleaning and beautification - *MOHAMMAD ASAD*

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IN COASTAL DISTRICTS

IMD issues yellow alert in Karnataka; heavy rains expected

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

The India Meteorological Department on Saturday issued a yellow alerts for parts of Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and several other states, forecasting moderate to heavy rains over the next 24 hours.

It also issued an orange warning across many other states, forecasting widespread hailstorms, thunderstorms, lightning, and gusty to squally winds reaching speeds of 60-70 kmph.

According to the IMD, coastal and Malnad districts are set to receive moderate to heavy showers, particularly during the afternoon and evening hours.

The change in weather is attributed to a low-pressure system over the Bay of Bengal, which is influencing rainfall across south interior Karnataka, coastal regions, and the Western Ghats.

- In Bengaluru, weather conditions are expected to remain partly sunny during the day.

In Bengaluru, weather conditions are expected to remain partly sunny during the day, with cloudy skies and chances of light showers in the evening. Maximum temperatures are expected to hover around 32–34 degrees Celsius, while nights may stay relatively comfortable. —*Agencies*

—ANI

M'rashtra SIR: VBA Chief claims 2.9 cr voters deleted

MUMBAI, 4 APRIL

Prakash Ambedkar, leader of the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi, claimed that up to 2.9 crore voters' names could be removed during Maharashtra's Special Intensive Revision (SIR). He warned that such a large-scale deletion could impact upcoming elections. Ambedkar stated, "The government's falsehood could have been exposed if Rahul Gandhi had gathered an affected family from a ward where votes were reduced, claiming non-existence under SIR and presented them before the media. It would have proved that the Election Commission is committing fraud." He questioned the Election Commission's functioning on social media, saying, "Irregularities in the voter list revision process could lead to large-scale exclusion of voters in the state." —*PTI*

Fadnavis calls for unopposed win for DyCM in Baramati

MUMBAI, 4 APRIL

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis urged all parties to ensure an unopposed bypoll in Baramati, following the death of Ajit Pawar in a plane crash. He requested consensus to respect Maharashtra's political traditions. Fadnavis said, "All parties should show a large-hearted approach and ensure the by-election is held unopposed." Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar, a Rajya Sabha member and wife of Ajit, is expected to file her nomination on 6 April for the 23 April by-election. Ajit, an eight-time MLA, lost his life along with four others on 28 January. The NCP has declared it will not contest, but Congress intends to field a candidate. Sunetra was sworn in as Deputy CM on 31 January and elected NCP President on 26 February. —*PTI*

Vijay calls rival alliances 'exhausted and confused'

PUDUCHERRY, 4 APRIL

Attacking both the ruling and Opposition blocs in poll-bound Puducherry as having failed the aspirations of the local people, TVK Chief **Vijay** on Saturday positioned his party as a credible alternative, promising 100 per cent efforts to secure full statehood and a slew of welfare measures including free electricity.

The actor-politician labelled the ruling AINRC-BJP combine as "exhausted," and the Congress-DMK bloc as "confused."

"In Tamil Nadu too, the DMK-Congress is a confused alliance. In Puducherry too, it is similarly a confused alliance. Then there is another alliance, the alliance of NR Congress (AINRC) and BJP. That is not a joined alliance; it is an exhausted alliance that couldn't stay together," Vijay said.

Vijay urged the electorate to shun the traditional blocs. He said DMK-Congress alliance is so "confused" that in some constituencies, "they even oppose each other" despite being allies. —*PTI*

'Vijayan afraid of PM to protect his kids'

CM linked to those 'attacking' minorities: Raga

KOCHI/IDUKKI, 4 APRIL

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday launched a scathing attack on Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, alleging that he is "afraid" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to protect his children.

Addressing an election rally in Fort Kochi, Rahul claimed that the CM was "compromised" by corruption and made an apparent reference to the Exalogic case allegedly involving his daughter, without naming anyone.

The case involves allegations of illegal financial transactions between Cochin Minerals and Rutile Ltd (CMRL) and Exalogic Solutions, a now-defunct IT firm owned by Vijayan's daughter, Veena.

"Which father will not try to protect his children? But the problem is that you allowed things that now require protection. You did things that require protection," he said.

"He is seeking the protection of the most right-wing forces in the country. That is the nature of politics in Kerala," he alleged.

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, with MP KC Venugopal, and others in Alappuzha, Kerala, on Saturday —*PTI*

Gandhi further alleged that the LDF was no longer a Left formation but had aligned with "the worst political force" in the country, which he said targets people based on their faith—whether Christians, Muslims, Sikhs or Jains.

Additionally, addressing the gathering as part of his campaign, Gandhi alleged that the agriculture, plantation sectors and healthcare system had collapsed under the LDF government.

Referring to human-animal conflict, he said the UDF would try to address the issue if voted to power.

He also alleged that unemployment was on the rise in the state. Gandhi reiterated his allegation of a nexus between the ruling LDF and the BJP. —*PTI*

'Countdown for LDF's removal has begun'

Modi says BJP will ensure Kerala's development

THIRUVALLA, 4 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said that the countdown for removal of the LDF government in Kerala has started, and a BJP-led NDA will come to power in the state.

Speaking at a BJP-led NDA rally here in Pathanamthitta district, Modi said that the saffron party workers in the state have signalled a strong mood to bid farewell to the Left rule.

Elections to 140 Assembly seats will be held on April 9 in the state.

In his address, the PM said that if the BJP comes to power in the state, it will ensure development in Kerala as it did after coming to power in six out of the seven north-east states and Goa, which have a significant Christian population. He said that Kerala has great potential, yet continues to lag behind other states in the race for development.

Basic infrastructure was poor in Kerala's rural areas as the LDF and UDF did not pay attention to that, he alleged.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi being felicitated during a public meeting in Thiruvalla, Kerala, on Saturday —*PTI*

The PM said that the NDA government at the Centre has not spared any effort for Kerala's development despite there being no BJP administration till now.

He said that the NDA government has spent five times more on development in Kerala than the Congress-led UPA regimes.

Modi also referred to the migration of youth from Kerala for jobs and said that it was the state's biggest problem.

During his speech, Modi said that claims that southern states will lose Lok Sabha seats due to population control were false.

Regarding the LDF and UDF accusations against each other of having deals with the BJP, Modi said that both fronts are accusing each other of being the BJP's 'B-team' as they know the saffron party is the 'A-team' in Kerala. —*PTI*

Stalin flays govt's 'Hindi imposition'

CHENNAI/NAGERCOIL/ NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK President MK Stalin on Saturday lashed out against the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre over its alleged attempt to impose Hindi language on non-Hindi speaking regions through the CBSE's newly unveiled curriculum framework.

Referring to the CBSE's curriculum framework, Stalin alleged the "so-called three-language formula" is in reality a "covert" mechanism to expand Hindi into non-Hindi speaking regions.

The same Union government that has "failed" to make Tamil a mandatory language in Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan schools—and has consistently failed to appoint adequate Tamil teachers, now seeks to lecture states on promoting Indian languages. "This is not commitment, this is rank hypocrisy," he asserted.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK President MK Stalin —*ANI*

EDU MINISTER SLAMS STALIN

Reacting sharply to Stalin's allegation on Hindi imposition, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan charged that the narrative of "imposition" is a "tired attempt" to mask political failures. He said mischaracterising a progressive and inclusive reform as "linguistic imposition" was aimed at creating unnecessary apprehension and confusion.

> **The Delhi team is 'hostile' to the needs or development of Tamil Nadu ... So, we must defeat the Delhi team, the Sanghi group, and prove that they have no space in Tamil Nadu**
>
> -Udhayanidhi Stalin, TN Deputy Chief Minister

Pradhan said, "The National Education Policy, 2020, is, in fact, a manifesto for linguistic liberation. It prioritises the mother tongue so every Tamil child can excel in their own glorious language

"By misrepresenting a flexible policy as compulsory Hindi, you are not defending Tamil; you are creating barriers that deny our youth the opportunity to become multilingual global leaders," he said in a post on X.

WITHDRAW FCRA BILL

Addressing a rally later in Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister also flayed the Centre's proposed FCRA Amendment Bill 2026, calling it "draconian". He alleged that it targeted minorities, especially Christian service organisations and demanded that it be dropped. —*PTI*

Not contesting in TN polls, says Annamalai

BJP leader **K Annamalai**, returning from Kerala after his campaign there, stated he is not in the electoral race. He clarified he was not on the party's list of probable candidates for the 23 April elections, as he chose to focus on campaigning. Annamalai said, "I am not in the race or list. My role is to campaign for the candidates across Tamil Nadu." He will campaign in Puducherry and Kerala until 7 April, then in Tamil Nadu until 23 April. He also mentioned attending a BJP core committee meeting and interacting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. —*PTI*

Remove Bhabanipur poll official close to Suvendu: TMC

KOLKATA, 4 APRIL

The TMC sought the immediate removal of the returning officer for the Bhabanipur assembly constituency in West Bengal, alleging he has proximity with BJP candidate **Suvendu Adhikari**.

In a representation submitted to Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Agarwal on Friday, the ruling party raised objections to the appointment of RO for the Bhabanipur seat in southern Kolkata.

The party alleged that the returning officer has a "documented and close association" with Adhikari, who is contesting from Bhabanipur against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Adhikari is also in the electoral fray from Nandigram in Purba Medinipur district.

According to the complaint, the RO had earlier served as block development officer in Nandigram-II, where his proximity to Adhikari was allegedly visible in public engagements.

The TMC claimed that such an association creates a "reasonable apprehension of bias" and "compromises the neutrality" required for conducting elections.

The TMC alleged that his appointment to the role, particularly ahead of elections, raises concerns of "preferential and motivated deployment".

Meanwhile, addressing a poll rally in Malda, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee claimed the culprits behind violence and gherao of judicial officers in Malda district's Mothabari have escaped. —*PTI*

> **Modi ji gave me a clear vision — to work for the youth and sports. He has given me the responsibility of the 2036 Olympics. I have to work hard with a team to bring the Olympics to this country.**
>
> -Leander Paes, Indian tennis legend

> **Yes. That is our (BJP) duty and responsibility. We (BJP) will end 'Love Jihad' and 'Land Jihad' in the state.**
>
> -Samik Bhattacharya, BJP WB Chief

EC clears 4,660 auxiliary polling booths in WB

The Election Commission approved the creation of 4,660 auxiliary polling stations in West Bengal, increasing the total to 85,379. These stations will be set up alongside booths with over 1,200 voters. It also approved the relocation of 321 polling stations. The decisions aim to improve voter convenience for the upcoming assembly elections in West Bengal.

The EC stressed proper communication with voters regarding relocations and adherence to guidelines. —*PTI*

Himanta to give 2 free LPG cylinders per home

GUWAHATI, 4 APRIL

Assam Chief Minister **Himanta Biswa Sarma** on Saturday said the state government will distribute one LPG cylinder each to people free of cost during the Bihu and Durga Puja festival.

Addressing an election rally at Mahmora constituency in Charaideo district, Sarma, however, did not clarify whether the free gas cylinders will be distributed among all the people of Assam or to a certain section.

"Going forward, we will distribute two free cylinders during Bihu and Durga Puja to the people, so that they can celebrate merrily," he said.

One free LPG cylinder each will be provided during the Bihu and Durga Puja festival, he said.

The Rongali Bihu festival will be celebrated from 14 April, while Durga Puja festivities will commence in October.

In March, Assam Chief Secretary Ravi Kota had said local refineries have the capacity to meet only about 30 per cent of the state's LPG demand, indicating a possible shortage of cooking fuel in the coming days in the wake of the war in West Asia.

Polling for the 126-member Assam assembly will be held on 9 April, while the results will be declared on 4 May. —*PTI*

I go to Parliament to create impact, says Chadha

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

"I go to Parliament to create impact, not ruckus," said Rajya Sabha MP **Raghav Chadha** on Saturday as he rejected allegations levelled against him by the Aam Aadmi Party, calling them "false" and part of a "coordinated campaign".

In a video, Chadha dismissed claims that he did not join opposition walkouts, terming the charge a "blatant lie".

He challenged his detractors to cite even a single instance where he failed to participate and said parliamentary proceedings are recorded through CCTV cameras.

Refuting another allegation that he refused to sign a motion related to the Chief Election Commissioner, Chadha said no party leader had asked him, either formally or informally, to sign it.

The MP said his focus in Parliament has been on raising public issues such as GST, income tax, air pollution in Delhi, water concerns in Punjab, public healthcare, education, railway passenger issues, menstrual health, unemployment and inflation. —*PTI*

CCTVS, APPS A SECURITY RISK

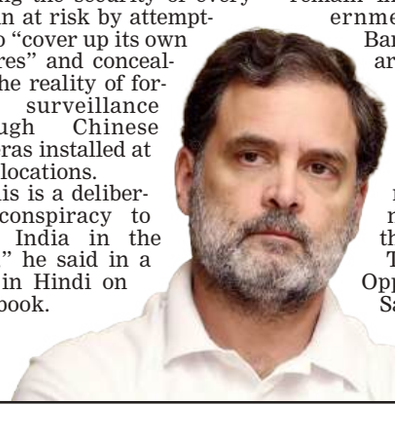
'Govt hiding reality of foreign surveillance'

- The Congress leader said five years after acknowledging that the ten lakh Chinese cameras used by the government posed risks regarding data transfer, the government has still failed to disclose whether the cameras monitoring us today are secure or not.

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Congress leader **Rahul Gandhi** on Saturday alleged that the Modi government is putting the security of every Indian at risk by attempting to "cover up its own failures" and concealing the reality of foreign surveillance through Chinese cameras installed at vital locations.

"This is a deliberate conspiracy to keep India in the dark," he said in a post in Hindi on Facebook.



Gandhi said the government recently banned the public use of Chinese CCTV cameras.

"Yet, Chinese cameras remain installed inside government buildings. Banned Chinese apps are resurfacing under changed names. Foreign AI platforms are processing sensitive data. And the government has absolutely nothing to say about this," he said.

The leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha said he asked these questions in Parliament to the Ministry of Electronics and IT.

"The response offered plenty of verbiage, but provided no answers to the specific questions asked," he claimed.

The Congress leader said five years after acknowledging that the ten lakh Chinese cameras used by the government posed risks regarding data transfer, the government has still failed to disclose whether the cameras monitoring us today are secure or not.

He had listed several steps taken by the government on the "use of technology for espionage" in response to Gandhi's question, which included protecting India's telecom networks, strengthening the legal framework on network security and data protection and strengthening the security of CCTV systems. —*PTI*

Woman raped, assaulted in Andhra Pradesh

PALNADU, 4 APRIL

A 32-year-old woman working as an outsourced staffer in a government department was allegedly raped and assaulted by an unidentified person at Macherla, a police official said on Saturday. Palnadu SP B Krishna Rao said the woman was staying alone. The suspect knocked at the door at 4pm on 2 April, asked for a glass of water, barged in and raped her. Police said she was separated from her husband and her daughter lived with grandparents. A case has been registered. The Chief Minister directed immediate arrest of the culprit. —*PTI*

Search on for woman in Assam train beheading

NORTH LAKHIMPUR, 4 APRIL

The police are searching for a woman who was accompanying a man accused of beheading his six-year-old daughter inside a train in Lakhimpur district, officials said on Saturday. The accused, a resident of Gogamukh, was arrested shortly after the incident on Friday at Silanibari railway station with help from locals. The child's body was recovered from the coach. A Northeast Frontier Railway spokesperson said the man attacked the girl with a sharp weapon. Eyewitnesses said she had been asking for snacks moments before the assault. Police suspect the accused is mentally ill. —*PTI*

—*INSTAGRAM*

Film director Ranjith sent to 3-day custody

KOCHI, 4 APRIL

A court on Saturday granted three-day police custody of film director Ranjith, arrested in connection with an alleged sexual harassment incident at a film shooting set. Ernakulam Chief Judicial Magistrate Selmath RM allowed the police petition seeking custody till Monday evening. Ranjith was produced in court from Ernakulam sub jail, where he had been lodged for three days. He filed a bail plea claiming innocence. Ranjith's counsel argued that the arrest did not follow the due procedure set by the Supreme Court and also cited his medical condition while applying for bail. The court said it would consider the bail application later after hearing arguments from both sides. Film director Ranjith was arrested after an actress approached the police alleging that Ranjith had sexually harassed her inside a parked caravan during a film shooting programme in Fort Kochi. —*PTI*

—*FREEPIK*

3 die suspiciously in Meerut after drinking liquor

MEERUT, 4 APRIL

Three people died under suspicious circumstances after consuming country liquor, although a preliminary probe has not confirmed the cause, officials said on Saturday. All three developed vomiting and abdominal pain after drinking on Friday and were rushed to hospital, where they were declared dead. An autopsy will determine the exact cause. Police said Baburam, Jitendra and Ankit bought liquor from a government-authorised outlet and drank it on the spot. Officials said the liquor was not confirmed as "toxic or expired." Teams from the health, forensic and intelligence departments are investigating the matter thoroughly. —*PTI*

Delhi mandates PNG for commercial LPG users

They must register with oil marketing companies for PNG

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

The Delhi government has tightened norms for the supply of commercial LPG cylinders, making it mandatory for businesses to either have a piped natural gas (PNG) connection in areas where the network is available or should have applied for it, says an official order.

In an order issued by the Food, Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department on 2 April, the government amended a key clause of its recently notified policy on the distribution of commercial LPG cylinders.

As per revised rules, commercial and industrial consumers will be eligible to receive LPG supplies only if they are registered with the concerned oil marketing company (OMC) and have applied for a PNG connection, wherever the network exists.

In areas where PNG infra is not yet in place, consumers will be required to submit an application expressing their intent to switch to PNG once it becomes available.

As per revised rules, commercial and industrial consumers will be eligible to receive LPG supplies only if they are registered with the concerned oil marketing company (OMC) and have applied for a PNG connection —*PTI*

Officials said OMCs will be required to verify documents at least once to ensure compliance with these conditions. Records of consumers who are ready to shift to PNG will also be shared with Indraprastha Gas Limited (IGL). The order also provides some flexibility. Businesses which need LPG along with PNG for their operations can apply to the additional commissioner of the department. A decision on such requests will be taken in consultation with OMCs.

"The OMCs should also collect such applications and submit them to the Additional Commissioner," the order stated. — *PTI*

WEST ASIA WAR

India faced global shocks successfully, says Jaishankar

RAIPUR, 4 APRIL

India has come through solidly from global shocks that tested its resilience, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said here on Saturday in an an apparent reference to the conflict in West Asia.

Speaking at the convocation ceremony of IIM Raipur, he emphasised that India has managed both domestic and external challenges successfully. He observed that the impact of conflicts on even distant societies has been profound, which is a testimony to the extent of globalisation.

The crisis in West Asia, which began in February after the US and Israel attacked Iran, has impacted global fuel supply and triggered a shortage of hydrocarbons.

Jaishankar stressed that there is no getting away from building robust national capabilities, which he noted is the most effective way for de-risking.

He said that the global order is changing with visible shifts in relative power and influence of countries, adding that the turbulence in the world is currently structural in many ways.

"New developments in technology, energy, military capability, connectivity and resources have encouraged risk-taking in an increasingly competitive environment. Everything today is being leveraged if not weaponised," the external affairs minister said.

He said the world is confronted with the prospects of securing itself in an increasingly volatile and unpredictable environment.

"This has necessitated a need to hedge, to de-risk and diversify, whether a business choice or foreign policy," Jaishankar added. — *PTI*

Sewage contaminates Jaipur water supply, hundreds ill

JAIPUR, 4 APRIL

Hundreds of residents of the Sushilpura area here fell ill week, allegedly due to sewage contamination of drinking water.

Several residents have reported symptoms like vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach pain, nausea, and fever, with children and the elderly the worst affected. Locals claim the crisis has impacted nearly every household, forcing many to rely on water tankers or packaged drinking water.

Pooran Mal Kumawat, a resident, said his family has been unwell for several days. "We have all been suffering from diarrhoea and weakness. My wife had to take injections," he said. Another resident, Janki Saini, said the situation has become difficult. "All three of my children are suffering from stomach pain and fever, and we are arranging water from outside," she said.

Jagdish Sahu, who has spent thousands of rupees on medical treatment so far, highed the burden caused by the crisis. Residents said the problem began after road construction allegedly damaged underground pipelines, leading to sewage mixing with drinking water. Overflowing drains and broken streets worsened conditions, they said.

Many residents have reported vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach pain, nausea, and fever, with children and the elderly the worst affected —*PTI*

Dr Anil Mehta, in charge of a nearby government dispensary, said around 150 patients have been treated in the last three days. Civil Lines MLA Gopal Sharma, who visited the area after protests by residents, said efforts were underway to resolve the issue.

Sharma added that teams from the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) and the health department have been deployed, and the distribution of medicines and water supply are being carried out. — *PTI*

'Marital discord no basis for abetment of suicide charge'

MUMBAI, 4 APRIL

A spouse cannot be accused of abetting the suicide of his or her partner merely because there was marital discord, the Bombay High Court said while quashing a case lodged against a woman for abetting the suicide of her husband.

The HC's Nagpur bench, in its order passed last week, held that matrimonial discord is common and suicide cannot be attributed to any of the spouses merely because there was a matrimonial dispute. It added that there has to be instigation or direct incitement from the accused to the victim to end life.

The bench allowed the plea filed by a 49-year-old woman, a teacher, seeking to quash the abetment of suicide case filed against her in 2019 by the Amravati police.

A single bench of Justice Urmila Joshi Phalke said that in the present case both the husband and the wife had levelled allegations of ill-treatment and abuse against each other and hence at the most it can be said that the woman might have been the reason for the man's frustration.

- The HC's Nagpur bench said that there must be clear instigation by the accused to make the victim end his/her life for the suicide abetment charge to take effect

In its order, the court noted that to charge a person for the offence of abetment, the prosecution must prove that the accused played a role in the suicide or had encouraged the individual to take their life or conspired with others to ensure that the person committed suicide.

There has to be instigation or direct incitement (mens rea) from the accused to the victim to commit suicide, the HC said. — *PTI*

Court remands Al-Falah chairman in 2nd PMLA case

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

A Delhi court on Saturday remanded Jawad Ahmad Siddiqui, chairman of the Al-Falah group, in 14 days of judicial custody in connection with a money laundering case involving the fraudulent acquisition of land worth Rs 45 crore in Delhi. Siddiqui was presented before Additional Sessions Judge Sheetal Chaudhary Pradhan after 10 days of ED custody granted on 25 March. He has been remanded till 17 April.

On 24 March, the ED arrested Siddiqui in the second PMLA case. The probe found forged documents were used for land purchase at Khasra No. 792, Madanpur Khadar village, valued at Rs 45 crore, with a stated consideration of Rs 75 lakh. The ED alleges that Siddiqui conspired with others for fabricating the documents. —*PTI*

ISRO's Ladakh mission to test astronauts

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has announced the launch of a mission in Ladakh to examine the physiological, psychological and operational dynamics of "gaganyatris (astronauts)" and ground teams functioning in a high-altitude environment.

The scientific data generated on crew performance and human factors will contribute directly to the Gaganyaan programme and future long-duration missions.

Known as the Mission MITRA (Mapping of Interoperable Traits and Response Assessment), the study will be conducted until 9 April at an altitude of approximately 3,500 metres in Leh, simulating the environmental conditions of hypoxia, low temperature and isolation as a natural analog for spaceflight operations.

The mission is planned jointly by the ISRO and the IAF-Institute of Aerospace Medicine —*ISRO*

"This study is targeted to generate vital understanding on the team inter-operability between crew (gaganyatris) and ground control teams and effectiveness of decision making under environmental and operational stress," the ISRO said in a statement on Friday.

The ISRO and the IAF-Institute of Aerospace Medicine have designed the mission, and the Bengaluru-based start-up Protoplanet is responsible for facility management and statutory protocols. "Crew safety and performance are the most critical elements of all human spaceflight missions. The ability of the crew to communicate effectively, adapt to stress, maintain psychological resilience and help one another determines the mission's success," the statement said. "Analog missions conducted under controlled yet realistic conditions are utilised to understand how crew performs under challenging conditions," it added. — PTI

UP farmer claims ID misuse after getting Rs 14.66 crore tax notices

BADAUN, 4 APRIL

A farmer in Budaun district, Uttar Pradesh, has fallen victim to identity misuse after receiving tax notices worth Rs 14.66 crore.

The notices were allegedly issued against a fraudulent firm operating in Delhi, using his name.

The farmer's ordeal began when he received the tax notices, leaving him stunned. He submitted an application to the authorities to resolve the matter.

Following the application, the Budaun District Magistrate, Avneesh Rai, constituted a two-member team to investigate the matter. The team consists of the Additional District Magistrate (Finance) and the Deputy Commissioner (GST).

During an inquiry, it was discovered that a firm named "Ram Store" was being operated under the farmer's name in Delhi's Naraina Industrial Area.

An investigation has been launched to find out how the firm was able to use the farmer's identity and the officials who allowed it.

The district magistrate has assured that the farmer's identity will be protected during the investigation. — *PTI*

Man complains of extortion, held with 121 obscene videos

NASHIK, 4 APRIL

An extortion complaint landed a senior citizen here in trouble after a probe of his blackmailers uncovered 121 obscene videos, leading to his arrest for sexual exploitation after one of his victims came forward, police said on Saturday.

The police had earlier arrested four men for allegedly stealing a tablet from the senior citizen's office in the Satpur area and attempting to extort Rs 12 lakh from him by threatening to leak his private photographs and videos on social media.

The police had seized four mobile phones, two pen drives and a memory card from the men, and on checking these devices, found 121 obscene and objectionable video clips of women and friends of the complainant, Ravindra Ganpat Erande, the official said.

In a twist to the tale, one of the victims lodged a complaint against Erande, alleging that he had sexually exploited her at various hotels promising to provide a government job to her son, he said.

Following the complaint, Erande was arrested on Friday. A probe revealed that Erande had allegedly sexually exploited several women and shot obscene videos of them.

Erande had approached the Satpur police earlier this week with a complaint about his tablet being stolen from his office, stating that he had already paid the blackmailers Rs 10,000 and was to hand over Rs 50,000 on Thursday.

The police laid a trap and apprehended Akash Pundlik Bakre, Prakash Panpatil, Suraj Sunil Gawai and Shreepat Shinde for blackmail and extortion. — *PTI*

'UNINTENDED MISTAKE'

HC deletes criticism of new Trans Act

JODHPUR, 4 APRIL

The Rajasthan High Court has revised the epilogue of its recent judgment on transgender reservation, in which it made critical observations about the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act, 2026, saying it took away their right to self-identify their gender.

The bench comprising Justice Arun Monga and Justice Yogendra Kumar Purohit refused to delete the epilogue entirely but agreed that some paragraphs should not have been there.

"The court has ordered to remove some of the text, which the court said came by mistake and was neither intended nor necessary," said Vivek Mathur, the counsel for a 29-year-old transgender petitioner seeking clarification on the epilogue.

The HC bench refused to delete the epilogue entirely but agreed that some paragraphs should not have been there —*PTI*

The revision comes three days after the high court's 30 March ruling on a petition challenging a 2023 state notification placing transgenders in the OBC category without a distinct reservation framework.

In its original judgment, the court had appended an epilogue, expressing concern that the 2026 amendment marked a significant departure from the constitutional principle of self-perceived gender identity as recognised by the Supreme Court.

The now-deleted portions had cautioned that conditioning legal gender recognition on certification or administrative scrutiny risked reducing an inviolable aspect of personhood to a state-mediated entitlement.

The court had also warned against statutory developments that could dilute constitutional guarantees or render transgender rights illusory by procedural constraints.

In its new order, however, the HC removed these observations, clarifying that they were not essential to the adjudication of the case. — *PTI*

EARTH FROM ARTEMIS II

NASA released images of Earth taken from inside the Artemis II Orion spacecraft, about 2.19 lakh km away, as it travels toward the Moon. The image, which was taken through the capsule's window, shows Earth wrapped in a cloud-like blanket. The mission, carrying four crew members, marks the first human Moon mission in 57 years —X/@NASA

In Kerala, ageing voters seek security and dignity

Kerala's ageing population is currently at 16.5 per cent, which is the highest in the country —PTI

For 81-year-old Krishnamma, the high-stakes 9 April Kerala Assembly elections boil down to a single, urgent question. When party workers arrived at the doorstep of her modest, tile-roofed home in the hill hamlet of Vithura to seek a vote, she didn't want to hear about manifestos or political rivalries. Instead, she looked at them and asked, "When will I get my next pension payment?"

For thousands like her, the election is not just about politics, it is about survival, dignity and the assurance of care in the twilight years.

In a state often celebrated for its human development indicators, a silent demographic shift is underway, with Kerala's ageing population currently at 16.5 per cent — the highest in the country — and senior citizens forming a significant, powerful voting bloc.

The issues of elderly people are quite different from the voters of other age groups, as they want consistent disbursal of monthly pensions, medical facilities at their doorsteps and constructive means of engagement to address their loneliness.

As the LDF, UDF and NDA roll out promises tailored to this segment, Kerala's elderly are weighing not just what is being offered but also who can deliver with consistency and compassion.

Beyond economic and medical concerns, social isolation is emerging as a silent crisis among Kerala's elderly, especially those living alone as children migrate abroad.

Susheela, a retired government employee in Pandalam, wants a special scheme to address the safety and security of parents who live alone as children work abroad.

When Mohanan Nair, a KSRTC pensioner here, wants a dedicated space for senior citizens to spend time every day, Satheesh Chandran, a retired bank manager, feels that urgent steps are needed to address the social isolation being faced by the elderly.

The ruling LDF, highlighting its expansion of social welfare pensions in recent years, has promised to further increase their monthly assistance.

The UDF, meanwhile, has accused the government of alleged irregular disbursements and has pledged time-bound payments along with a revision of pension amounts.

The NDA has focused on creating a more structured social security framework, promising better integration of central schemes.

Senior CPI(M) leader and former Rajya Sabha MP TN Seema said the formulation of a "Vayojana Nayam" (Kerala State Policy for Elderly Persons) and the setting up of Senior Citizens Commission are among the significant achievements of the Pinarayi Vijayan-led LDF government.

"In the past 10 years, the Left government was able to create an elderly-friendly atmosphere in the state through a series of interventions," she told PTI.

She recalled that steps had been taken to popularise the concepts, like senior citizen clubs at the grassroots level through local self-government institutions for the productive engagement of the elderly.

Kerala became the first state to introduce an exclusive "elderly budget" along with the state budget document in January this year to address the geriatric demographic shift.

Senior citizens have become the major beneficiaries when palliative care has been extended widely and the concept of care economy has been implemented in the state by the government, Seema said.

However, senior Congress leader and former Assembly deputy speaker Palode Ravi questioned the claims of the ruling front and said the senior citizens have been one of the most untapped sections in society in the past 10 years.

"Senior citizens in Kerala are one of the most experienced and potential banks of talent. But the lack of visionary initiatives by the Left government has turned them into a mere group waiting for their monthly pension of Rs 2,000," he told PTI.

If the UDF comes to power, a dedicated system will be developed to make use of their talents and potentials completely, Ravi added.

BJP general secretary S Suresh also criticised the Left government in terms of its approach towards elders and accused it of not implementing many central schemes for them properly.

"Kerala is one of the very few states which has not implemented Vay Vandana Yojana, the central scheme which guarantees free healthcare up to Rs five lakh to those aged 70 years and above," he told PTI.

He alleged that the state government did not release the monthly pension to elderly people regularly.

If the NDA comes to power, the treatment for elderly people would be made completely free, the leader added.

The LDF, in its recently released election manifesto, promised several schemes for senior citizens, including retirement homes, strengthening of co-op care geriatric and palliative care centres and so on, along with the enhancement of monthly pensions up to Rs 3,000.

Meanwhile, the UDF promises to set up a dedicated department for the welfare of senior citizens and innovative initiatives like "Ammavadi" on the model of anganwadi for the care of elderly women. —PTI

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

RG Kar rape victim's mom takes on TMC bastion

RG Kar victim's mother and Panihati's BJP candidate Ratna Debnath —PTI

- The rape and murder of the postgraduate trainee doctor inside her workplace brought physicians, students and ordinary residents onto the streets. Hospitals went on strike. Protesters occupied roads through the night.

Twenty months after the rape and murder of a young doctor inside Kolkata's state-run RG Kar Medical College and Hospital triggered nationwide outrage, the politics of that crime has caught up with Bengal's election battlefield.

In Panihati, a constituency that for nearly six decades changed hands only between the Left and the Congress and later TMC, the 29 April contest is no longer just another election.

In this north Kolkata suburb, now regarded as a safe TMC seat, voters are being asked less about local grievances and more about a question that has haunted Bengal since August 2024: "Who failed the RG Kar victim, and who can still deliver justice?"

With the BJP fielding the victim doctor's mother, the TMC defending a fortress built over three decades, and the CPI(M) trying to reclaim a protest movement it helped lead, Panihati has become the constituency where Bengal's most emotionally charged issue is headed for its fiercest political test.

The BJP has fielded the victim doctor's mother, Ratna Debnath, against Tirthankar Ghosh, son of veteran TMC leader and outgoing MLA Nirmal Ghosh.

What is at stake in Panihati is no longer merely a seat in the assembly. It is the attempt by rival parties to claim ownership of Bengal's biggest protest movement in years and of the anger, grief and unanswered questions that still surround the RG Kar case.

For the BJP, the candidature is an attempt to convert the anger and distrust generated by the RG Kar movement into an anti-TMC vote.

For the ruling TMC, which has held the seat since 2011 through chief whip Nirmal Ghosh, it is a test of whether a hardened organisational bastion can survive a wave of public anger.

And for the CPI(M), whose cadres and student wings were among the most visible faces of the protests, Panihati offers a chance to reclaim a movement it believes the BJP is now trying to appropriate.

"If I can serve people, my daughter will also be happy. I want the lotus to bloom across West Bengal and the TMC to be uprooted," Debnath said.

Her plunge into politics comes nearly a year-and-a-half after the 9 August, 2024, crime that triggered perhaps the largest civil society movement in Bengal since the anti-land acquisition agitations of Singur and Nandigram.

The rape and murder of the postgraduate trainee doctor inside her workplace brought physicians, students and ordinary residents onto the streets.

Hospitals went on strike. Protesters occupied roads through the night. Demonstrations spread from Kolkata to Delhi, turning the case into a national flashpoint over women's safety and allegations of destruction of evidence.

In Bengal, however, the movement acquired a sharper political edge. The protests soon ceased to be merely a demand for justice for one victim. They became a wider indictment of the Mamata Banerjee government's handling of law and order, hospital administration and the suspicion that powerful people were being protected.

That mood now hangs heavily over Panihati.

The victim's father told PTI that the family had concluded only political change could ensure justice.

The Left has fielded Kalatan Dasgupta, one of the recognisable faces of the protests.

"Anyone can come into politics. We have no problem with that. If such an incident happens again, we will once again block roads, occupy the night and protest. Nobody can stop us from taking the path of protest. We will see this fight for justice through to the end," he said.

Panihati was once a Left fortress. Since the seat came into existence in 1967, the CPI held it repeatedly, interrupted only twice by the Congress.

Tirthankar Ghosh has responded cautiously, saying the TMC shared the family's pain while accusing the BJP of seeking political mileage from a tragedy.

The arithmetic appears to favour the ruling party.

In the 2024 Lok Sabha election, the TMC led in the segment with nearly 49.6 per cent of the votes against the BJP's 34.6 per cent. Even in the 2021 assembly polls, despite the BJP surge across Bengal, the TMC won comfortably with more than 41 per cent votes.

Panihati has 1,97,141 voters in the 2026 electoral rolls after the SIR. Scheduled Castes account for a little over 5 per cent of the electorate, while Muslims constitute less than 5 per cent, making the seat overwhelmingly Hindu and dominated by lower-middle-class and middle-class suburban voters.

Once a thriving centre of rice trade and later of mills and small factories, Panihati today bears the marks of suburban decline: crumbling roads, shrinking job opportunities and corruption.

The RG Kar issue has fused with that resentment. At tea stalls and market corners, the same question is repeated: "If a doctor could be raped and murdered inside a hospital, and if her parents still have to fight for justice, what does that say about the state?" —PTI

Iranians overseas say their loved ones are being detained back home

Iran's government is detaining family members and threatening to seize the property of Iranian opposition figures in exile, some tell The Associated Press, in the latest crackdown on dissenting voices as the war rages on.

Activists overseas play a key role in tracking the crackdown, which is complicated by the internet shutdown imposed earlier this year during massive nationwide protests against the Islamic theocracy. Watchdogs say security forces shot and killed thousands of people.

The war with the US and Israel has intensified authorities' threats against anyone speaking to outside media or activists. Now that pressure appears to be expanding to intimidate activists in exile.

IRAN 'TOOK MY MOTHER AWAY TO MAKE ME BE QUIET'

Intelligence agents in Tehran on 15 March detained the brother of Hossein Razzagh, a former political prisoner who fled last year to Europe, Razzagh told the AP.

"My own brother isn't at all political and doesn't do any kind of political activity. It's to put me under pressure," he said.

His brother, Ali, was taken from his home in Tehran and was able to phone his wife that night "for a few seconds" from a detention centre run by Iran's Intelligence Ministry, Razzagh said.

Since then, the family and his lawyer have been unable to contact him. But the intelligence ministry told them it was reviewing his contact with his brother, Razzagh said.

Another activist who fled, Behnam Chegini, said his 20-year-old niece was detained on March 10 for a week. The niece was taken from her parents' house in the city of Arak soon after she returned from Tehran, where her university had closed because of the war.

She was later released on bail and put under a travel ban.

Chegini, who is now based in France, said the detention was at least in part "because she is my niece and they know that".

Sareh Sedighi, an activist who fled after her 2021 death sentence was overturned, said her mother was detained from her home last month in the western town of Urmia.

Her mother suffers from health problems and requires daily insulin doses, she added.

And Mahshid Nazemi, a former political prisoner and activist who now lives in France, said at least one friend was detained and questioned about contact with her.

Civil rights activists Nasrin Sotoudeh and Reza Khandan with their children, Nima Khandan and Mehraveh Khandan, at their home in Tehran, Iran, in 2023. Nasrin and Reza were arrested by the Iranian security forces in 2026 & 2024, respectively —PTI

AUTHORITIES TARGET THE PROPERTY OF OUTSPOKEN EXILES

Iran's judiciary has begun seizing the property of public figures critical of the country's rulers, under an anti-espionage law approved during last year's 12-day war with Israel that punishes media and cultural activities deemed to support Iran's enemies.

A judiciary spokesman on 31 March said on state TV that more than 200 indictments for confiscations have been or are being issued.

Borzou Arjmand, an Iranian actor living in California, found out from news reports that his assets in Iran had been confiscated. After his outspoken support for protests in 2022, Arjmand was unable to return to Iran. Since then, authorities have blocked his bank accounts.

Arjmand has expressed support on social media for Reza Pahlavi, the son of Iran's last shah, who has organised an opposition movement abroad and supported US-Israeli strikes.

Pressuring exiled figures is meant "so the Iranian people's voice doesn't reach the world," Arjmand said.

At least three other figures living outside Iran — star soccer player Sardar Azmoun, musician Mohsen Yeghaneh and university professor Ali Sharifi Zarchi — have been on lists of confiscations, according to two semiofficial news agencies in Iran.

CONDITIONS ARE WORSENING: RIGHTS

Iranian security and judicial officials have warned that any new anti-government protests will be met with lethal force.

State media regularly report arrests around the country, describing people as "mercenaries" or "agents" of Israel and the United States, "royalist thugs" or "traitorous elements".

Reports have alleged that some sent information to "hostile networks".

Iran Human Rights, a Norway-based group, has tracked several hundred detentions since the war began on 28 February, using its networks in the country and state media reports, said its director, Mahmood Amiry-Moghhaddam. He said the full number is likely far higher.

Among those detained is human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, taken by intelligence agents from her house in Tehran, said her daughter Mehraveh Khandan, who lives in Amsterdam. The 64-year-old Sotoudeh had been out on bail for health reasons following an earlier detention.

Little is known about how trials are functioning, as Israeli airstrikes have targeted buildings connected to the judicial system.

Some report deteriorating conditions inside crowded prisons. Speaking from Tehran, the wife of a political prisoner held at Iran's Evin Prison worried it could be struck as it was during last year's war.

IRANIAN OPPN TRIES TO ORGANISE OVERSEAS

The situation has led to new attempts to organise the highly fragmented Iranian opposition abroad.

Shortly before the war, Razzagh and others began planning an opposition conference in London, the Iran Freedom Congress, to bring together pro-democracy groups. Razzagh represented a group of Iran-based opposition figures including Soutoudeh and imprisoned Nobel laureate Narges Mohammadi.

He called the conference a first step toward forming a coalition to push for a "political transition" in Iran.

For decades, Iran's rulers have quashed organised political opposition. Some activists in the diaspora say the war is worsening that pressure. —PTI

TN-born Rini Sampath runs for DC Mayor

WASHINGTON, 4 APR

Tamil Nadu-born Rini Sampath is the first South Asian candidate to be on the ballot for Washington DC's mayoral primary. The 31-year-old Democrat, a government contractor, campaigns on 'Fix the Basics' and promises "A new DC". Born in Theni, Tamil Nadu, she moved to the US at age seven and has lived in DC for over a decade. Sampath stated, "In just four weeks, we made the mayoral ballot as the first South Asian candidate in DC history to do it. That's what a lean, people-powered campaign can accomplish." The primary is scheduled for 16 June, with the general election on 3 November. Other candidates include Janeese Lewis George, Kenyan McDuffie, Gary Goodweather, Robert L Gross, and Rhonda Hamilton. *—PTI*

Iran rejects US' 48-hr ceasefire proposal

Araghchi says want conclusive end to war

TEHRAN/ISLAMABAD/ WASHINGTON, 4 APRIL

Tehran rejected a 48-hour ceasefire proposal from the US that was delivered by an intermediatory country, an official told Iran's semi-official Fars News Agency.

The two-day ceasefire proposal was reportedly sent on 2 April. The US has not commented on the report. Notably, Iranian officials have repeatedly said that they have no "trust" in talks with Washington.

Fars did not name the intermediatory country, but Pakistan has been positioning itself as the broker for ceasefire talks.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that Tehran had not rejected Islamabad's push to mediate tensions, as reported by American media, but that the Islamic Republic wanted "the terms of a conclusive and lasting end to the illegal war." He said Iranian negotiators were willing to go to Pakistan.

Rescue workers rush to provide relief after Israeli-US airstrikes damaged a building in Iran, on Saturday *—IRAN RED CRESCENT*

Iran has also called the list of US demands unacceptable.

However, Pakistan's Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Andrabi on Saturday said the reports were "baseless" and a "figment of imagination".

"We categorically reject these false insinuations attributed to purported official sources as baseless and a figment of imagination. Any attribution to official sources in this regard is incorrect," he said.

He said both Pakistan and China had urged Iran to engage, but "Tehran has so far not conveyed its readiness to take part in the dialogue". He added that Pakistani leaders, despite Tehran not giving a reply, have remained in contact with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and Araghchi. *—AGENCIES*

US continues to search for missing pilot

CAIRO, 4 APRIL

The US military continued a frantic search for a missing pilot on Saturday after Iran shot down two American warplanes. One pilot was rescued on Friday, US officials said, after Iran stated that it shot down a US F-15E Strike Eagle – previously reported to have been a F35 jet.

The second jet was US A-10 attack aircraft, according to Iranian state media, which said it crashed in the Persian Gulf after being struck by Iranian defence forces.

Neither the White House nor the Pentagon released public information about the downed planes, but a US official confirmed that the second plane crashed, without providing details.

Iranian state-media has urged the public to hand over the missing pilot to authorities alive.

Notably, the jets were downed as both US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have asserted that they have gained complete air supremacy over Iran.

Iranian state-media posted pictures of debris in a truck, saying it was part of the wreckage of one of the US planes it downed *—PRESS TV*

It is the first time in 20 years that a US warplane has been shot down in combat. An A-10 Thunderbolt II was shot down during the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

BLACKHAWK DOWN?

Iranian state-media published footage of at least two UH-60 Black Hawk Helicopters being hit by gunfire. The helicopters were deployed for the search-and-rescue mission, and were reportedly safe.

'WE'RE IN WAR'

Asked if the destruction of the aircrafts will have a bearing on diplomatic talks with Iran, Trump said, "no, not at all. We're in war." He refused to divulge details. *—AGENCIES*

US offshore drilling firms to reunite after 2010 spill

WASHINGTON, 4 APRIL

The Trump administration announced plans to merge the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, creating the Marine Minerals Administration. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum said this move aims for a "streamlined approach" that maintains safety standards. The agencies were separated after the 2010 Gulf oil spill, which led to the disbanding of the Minerals Management Service. Critics argue this reorganisation risks safety, with environmental groups warning that it resembles a "handout" to the oil industry. *—PTI*

Imran Khan, wife Bushra seek urgent court hearing

ISLAMABAD, 4 APRIL

Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi, have petitioned the Islamabad High Court to prioritise their appeals in the Toshakhana-I case. The couple was sentenced to 14 years in on 31 January, 2024, for unlawfully selling state gifts, and they challenged the conviction in the Islamabad High Court (IHC), which suspended the sentences in April, 2024. In the petitions, they sought early fixation of appeals against conviction for final adjudication. Khan argued that the trial court's judgment was passed without the "proper application of judicial mind" and suffers from a "serious misreading of material evidence". It also cites Khan's health. *—ANI*

WAR EXPANDS

Israel restricts movement at Holy Sepulchre ahead of Easter

Israel continued to restrict access to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem even ahead of Easter, citing security concerns. It has also restricted movement near the Western Wall, and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. This would mark the first time that access to the church—which is known as the site of Jesus' crucifixion, burial, and resurrection—is blocked over Easter. Earlier, authorities barred the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem from attending Palm Sunday prayers at the Church, but quickly overturned the decision amid backlash.

Iran's Parl Speaker hints at targeting Bab el-Mandeb Strait

Iran's Parliamentary Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf hinted at targeting the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, a crucial waterway near Yemen that connects the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. "What share of global oil, LNG, wheat, rice, and fertiliser shipments transits the Bab el-Mandeb Strait?" he wrote on X. "Which countries and companies account for the highest transit volumes through the Strait?" Iran's chokehold of the Strait of Hormuz has already sent global oil and gas prices spiralling.

Dutch police probe blast outside pro-Israel Christian centre

Dutch police are investigating a small explosion outside a Christian centre that promotes Israel. Police in Gelderland province said in a post on X that nobody was injured in the explosion on Friday night and that it caused only limited damage at an address in Nijkerk, in the central Netherlands. No arrests have been made yet.

LOST CHILDHOOD

Children in Gaza purportedly hold a mock funeral procession for a doll, as they mimick the horrors they are subjucated to *—SCREENGRAB*

Iran's Basher nuclear plant hit; Oracle office damaged in UAE

The Bushehr Nuclear facility in Iran was hit by Israeli or US airstrikes, the fourth time the facility has been struck since the start of the war *—X @ARAGHCHI*

DUBAI, 4 APRIL

The Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran said that an airstrike hit near its Bushehr nuclear facility, killing a security guard and damaging a support building. It's the fourth time the facility has been targeted.

The head of Russia's state nuclear corporation, Rosatom, said that 198 workers were being evacuated.

The agency, citing confirmation from Iranian authorities, said in a statement on X that there was "no increase in radiation levels" after Saturday's attack. However, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghch said that the US and Israel were disregarding the safety of Iranians and pushing for massive civilian damage.

IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi expressed "deep concern about the reported incident and says [nuclear] sites or nearby areas must never be attacked, noting that auxiliary site buildings may contain vital safety equipment", the statement read.

- The Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran said that there was no "no increase in radiation levels" after the attack, but IAEA's Director General expressed concern about the repeated strikes

Meanwhile, Iranian state media reported explosions at a major petrochemical complex in southwestern Iran, saying it was hit by US-Israeli airstrikes that wounded five people.

Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency reported that several facilities at the Mahshahr Petrochemical Special Zone in the Khuzestan province were hit by strikes on Saturday. The Bandar Imam Petrochemical Complex that operates within the zone sustained damage.

ORACLE HIT IN DUBAI

Meanwhile, an apparent Iranian drone damaged the Dubai headquarters of Oracle after Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard threatened the firm. Footage showed a large hole in the building's southwestern corner.

The sheikhdom's Dubai Media Office, which speaks for its government, noted a "minor incident caused by debris from an aerial interception that fell on the facade," saying there were no injuries.

Oracle Corp, based in Austin, Texas, didn't immediately comment.

The Guard has accused some of the largest US tech companies of being involved in "terrorist espionage" operations against the Islamic Republic and called them legitimate targets. Amazon Web Services facilities in the UAE and Bahrain were hit in earlier drone strikes. *—Agencies*

Pak slashes petrol price after record hike caused protests

ISLAMABAD, 4 APRIL

A day after an unprecedented hike in fuel prices triggered nationwide protests, Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said in a midnight address on Friday that government had slashed the petrol price by PKR 80, making the commodity available to the end consumer for PKR 378 per litre.

The government on Thursday announced an unprecedented hike of 43 per cent and 55 per cent in the prices of petrol and high-speed diesel (HSD), respectively. Petrol prices rose from PKR 321.17 to PKR 458.41 per litre.

Sharif said the petrol price would remain unchanged for at least one month.

PAK TO RETURN $3.5B UAE DEBT

Pakistan has decided to return USD 3.5 billion in debt to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) before the end of the month, a senior Pakistani official said. Pakistan's central bank reserves are at approximately USD 16.3 billion, meaning a repayment of around USD 3 billion could reduce reserves by nearly 18 per cent, significantly weakening the country's external buffer and import cover.

The UAE reportedly sought the immediate return of the funds, which were part of external financial support extended in 2019 through the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development to stabilise Pakistan's balance of payments. *—AGENCIES*

8 arrested for kidnapping rapper Gucci Mane

DALLAS, 4 APRIL

Rapper Gucci Mane was allegedly kidnapped at gunpoint earlier this year, resulting in the arrest of eight men, including a fellow artist signed to his label. Prosecutors claim rapper Pooh Shiesty, born Lontrell Williams Jr, led the ambush, pretending to hold a meeting, and kept Mane captive in a recording studio, forcing him to sign papers releasing him from his contract. Mane, based in Atlanta, has collaborated with stars like Usher, Doja Cat, and Drake, and founded 1017 Records in 2007. The defendants, yet to enter pleas, face potential life imprisonment. Eight suspects were detained in Dallas, Memphis, and Nashville, charged with kidnapping and armed robbery, while one remains at large. *—AGENCIES*

$72.5 MILLION FUND

Settlement in Epstein case to help 75 victims: Bank of America

Sex offender Jeffrey Epstein & his accomplice Ghislaine Maxwell *—X*

NEW YORK, 4 APRIL

Lawyers say up to 75 women who were sexually abused by Jeffrey Epstein since 2008 may benefit from a USD 72.5 million fund set up as part of a settlement that Bank of America reached with lawyers. Attorney David Boies said victims' lawyers believe between 60 and 75 women will be eligible for settlement payouts.

Lawyers for women abused by Epstein had sued the bank, saying it ignored suspicious financial transactions involving Epstein that occurred while he was abusing girls and women from June 2008 to his arrest in early July 2019 on federal sex trafficking charges.

US District Judge Jed S Rakoff gave the deal preliminary approval on Thursday and set a final approval hearing for 27 August.

He also ordered lawyers to submit to him a broader list of publications to be used to notify Epstein victims that the settlement fund exists by Friday.

- Lawyers for women abused by Epstein had sued the bank, saying it ignored suspicious financial transactions involving Epstein

Rakoff said, "While it's perhaps extremely likely that the victims of Epstein's monstrous acts can never be fully compensated, they are entitled to receive just compensation from any person or entity that knowingly, recklessly facilitated his sexual trafficking."

The bank said in a statement: "While we stand by our prior statements made in the filings in this case, including that Bank of America did not facilitate sex trafficking crimes, this resolution allows us to put this matter behind us and provides further closure for the plaintiffs." *—PTI*

5 KILLED, 30 HURT IN UKRAINE BY RUSSIAN STRIKES

KYIV, 4 APRIL

Russian drone strikes on Ukraine overnight into Saturday killed five people and injured 30 more, Ukrainian officials said Saturday.

Five people — three women and two men — were killed in the city of Nikopol in the Dnipropetrovsk region, and 19 others, including a 14-year-old girl, were wounded. The attack damaged market stalls and a shop.

In the city of Sumy, not far from the border with Russia, a strike injured 11 people, including a 15-year-old. Fires also broke out in Kyiv.

Russia fired 286 drones at Ukraine overnight, 260 of which were downed, the Ukrainian Air Force said.

Meanwhile, in Russia's Rostov region, on the border with Ukraine, one person was killed and four sustained injuries from Kyiv's drones. *—PTI*

100 killed by earthquake, floods in Afghanistan

KABUL, 4 APRIL

At least 12 people, including eight members of the same family, were killed in Kabul after a 5.8 magnitude earthquake rattled parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Tremors were also felt in parts of North India. Meanwhile, at least 77 people have been killed by landslides and torrential rain over the past 10 days in the country.

A child was injured when the house collapsed due to the earthquake, said Hafizullah Basharat, deputy spokesman for the Kabul Governor.

It is unclear if the toll is higher, as authorities have put up discrepant figures.

Quakes have caused thousands of deaths recently in the region. Friday's earthquake had an epicentre in the Hindu Kush mountain range, according to the Euro-Mediterranean Seismological Centre and the US Geological Survey.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's Disaster Management Authority said that 137 injured have also been injured in rains, and said that heavy rains have been forecast in the coming days. *—PTI*

At least 77 people have been killed by rains and landslides in Afghanistan over 10 days *—@IOMAFGHANISTAN*

— ANI

Vedanta posts mixed result in Q4 of FY26

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Mining major Vedanta Ltd on Friday reported a mixed performance for the last quarter of 2025-26, as its production of aluminium and zinc rose while output of iron ore, steel, and oil & gas declined. The company's total aluminium production rose by 2 per cent. In the oil and gas segment, Vedanta's average daily gross production dropped 15 per cent during the March quarter to 81,500 barrels of oil equivalent per day. Iron ore production decreased by 3 per cent during the quarter, and steel output declined marginally by 1 per cent. Vedanta Group is a global natural resources and technology conglomerate, with a portfolio that spans across critical minerals, energy transition metals, oil, gas and power. —*PTI*

IFFCO clocks profit of Rs 4,106 cr in FY 2025-26

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Ltd. (IFFCO) has clocked a record profit before tax of Rs 4,106 crores in the financial year 2025-26. IFFCO said it set new benchmarks in production and sales. A record sale of 118.75 lakh metric tonnes of fertilisers, with a nationwide supply of 119.68 lakh metric tonnes, proves their allegiance to farmers' needs. The popularity of nano-fertilisers grew rapidly, with sales surpassing 30.1 lakh bottles. Products like Nano Urea Plus, Nano DAP, Nano Zinc, Nano Copper, and Dharamrut have proven to be effective, eco-friendly, and cost-efficient alternatives for farmers. IFFCO inaugurated its fourth nano-fertiliser plant in Devanahalli in Bengaluru, increasing the total production capacity to 950,000 bottles per day. —*ANI*

'Self-reliance in energy drives E20 ethanol push'

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

India's rollout of 20 per cent ethanol blending in petrol (E20) is driven by energy self-reliance goals rather than geopolitical disruptions, with scope to raise blending levels further given surplus capacity and feedstock supply, said CK Jain, Grains Ethanol Manufacturers Association's president adding "E20 is not based on the war". India began its rollout of E20 from 1 April, which he called a checkpoint, noting that feedstock availability and investor participation has been established. India's ethanol capacity is about 2,000 crore litres and may grow by 10 per cent, while 20 per cent blending requires 1,300–1,400 crore litres, including 1,200–1,250 crore litres from oil marketing companies —*ANI*

Govt urges digital booking of LPG, shuns panic buying

LPG booking interval is 25 days in urban areas, 45 in rural

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas on Friday said the government is making all efforts to ensure availability of petrol, diesel and LPG, and citizens are advised to avoid panic purchase and unnecessary booking of LPG.

Citizens are advised to beware of rumours and rely only on official sources for correct information.

Citizens were requested to use digital modes for booking of LPG cylinders, avoid visiting LPG distributors unless necessary and use alternate fuels such as PNG, induction and electric cooktops wherever feasible.

The Petroleum Ministry further said that the Government has given the highest priority to domestic LPG and PNG, along with high priority to hospitals and educational institutions. It has implemented several rationalisation measures on both the supply and demand side, including enhancing refinery production, increasing the booking interval from 21 to 25 days in urban areas and up to 45 days in rural areas and prioritising sectors for supply.

States were directed to prioritise LPG distribution, while maintaining strict vigilance against hoarding, diversion, and misinformation —*ANI*

The Ministry of Coal has issued an order to Coal India and Singareni Collieries to allot higher quantities to states for distributing coal to small, medium and other consumers. States have been advised to facilitate the new PNG connections for both domestic and commercial consumers.

States were directed to prioritise LPG distribution, especially for domestic and essential needs, while maintaining strict vigilance against hoarding, diversion, and misinformation. They may consider managing targeted distribution of 5 kg FTL LPG cylinders, based on local requirements, along with OMCs.

Online LPG cylinder bookings increased to 94 per cent on an industry basis yesterday. To prevent diversion at the distributor level, Delivery Authentication Code (DAC) based deliveries have been increased from 53 per cent to 86 per cent.

An additional allocation of 48000 KL of Kerosene over and above the regular allocation has been made to all the states and Union Territories. —*ANI*

HDFC Bank's deposits grow 15%, advances jump 12%

MUMBAI, 4 APRIL

HDFC Bank, India's largest private sector lender, announced its fourth-quarter business update on Saturday, highlighting a 15 per cent year-on-year growth in deposits and a 12 per cent rise in advances.

The bank's exchange filing revealed that its average advances under management stood at Rs 29.64 lakh crore for the March 2026 quarter, up from Rs 26.96 lakh crore in the same period last year, marking a 10 per cent increase.

As of 31 March, 2026, period-end advances were approximately Rs 30.58 lakh crore, a 10.2 per cent rise from Rs 27.73 lakh crore a year earlier. Gross advances at year-end totalled Rs 29.60 lakh crore, growing 12.0 per cent from Rs 26.44 lakh crore. On the liabilities side, average deposits rose 12.8 per cent to Rs 28.51 lakh crore from Rs 25.28 lakh crore.

The bank's stock fell nearly 25 per cent following the resignation of part-time Chairman and independent director Atanu Chakraborty —*HDFC*

CASA deposits averaged Rs 9.18 lakh crore, an increase of 10.8 per cent, while time deposits averaged Rs 19.33 lakh crore, up 13.7 per cent .

Year-end total deposits reached Rs 31.06 lakh crore, a 14.4 per cent increase from Rs 27.15 lakh crore. CASA deposits stood at Rs 10.61 lakh crore, up 12.3 per cent, and time deposits at Rs 20.45 lakh crore, a 15.5 per cent rise.

The bank's stock fell nearly 25 per cent following the resignation of part-time Chairman and independent director Atanu Chakraborty. —*PTI*

IRAN WAR WILL IMPACT INDIAN EXPORTS TO NATIONS: OFFICIAL

HYDERABAD, 4 APRIL:

If the West Asia conflict continues, India's exports to other parts of the world will also be impacted, central commerce secretary Rajesh Agrawal said on Saturday.

Indian exports during the last financial year were expected to remain on a positive trajectory despite the crisis, he added.

Speaking on the sidelines of 'Chintan Shivir - Scaling Up Pharma Exports', Agrawal said," Around 12-13 per cent of our exports go to the region, which be will directly get impacted. And if it goes on for long, our exports to other parts of the world will also get impacted as some of the value chains will rotate back." He said the Centre is trying to see that the supply chains get minimum impact as far as possible. The impact of the crisis will be there for the next few months or years, depending on which supply chain or which infrastructure has been impacted. —*PTI*

India's pharma exports cross USD 28B till Feb

HYDERABAD, 4 APRIL

India's pharmaceutical exports stood at over USD 28 billion up to February of the current financial year, registering a growth of more than 5 per cent compared to the same period last year, a top official said on Saturday.

K Raja Bhanu, Director General of the Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India (Pharmexcil), said the sector, currently valued at around USD 60 billion, is projected to grow to USD 130 billion by 2030.

"Despite global challenges, pharmaceutical exports have been among the few sectors to maintain growth momentum. Exports during April–February FY26 stood at USD 28.29 billion, reflecting a growth of 5.6 per cent compared to the same period in FY25, led by formulations, biologicals, vaccines and AYUSH products," he said.

Pharmexcil Chairman Namit Joshi said India is likely to end the current financial year at levels similar to FY25. The United States accounts for 34 per cent of exports, followed by Europe at 19 per cent, he added. Exports reached USD 30.47 billion in FY2024–25, growing 9.4 per cent. —*PTI*

India's VC investments increase to USD 16B in 2025: Bain report

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

India's Venture Capital (VC) and growth funding ecosystem continued to expand in 2025, with investments rising to around USD 16 billion, marking the second consecutive year of growth, the India Venture Capital Report 2026 by Bain & Company stated.

The report highlights that the growth comes despite a slowdown in broader private capital markets, underscoring sustained investor confidence in India's start-up ecosystem and macroeconomic fundamentals.

It noted that this performance was particularly significant as overall private capital deployment remained soft globally.

Funding growth in 2025 was balanced between a rise in deal volumes and larger deal sizes.

Fintech emerged as one of the strongest-performing sectors during the year, with deal value more than doubling year-on-year as investors backed scalable platforms and new business models.

- The growth comes despite a slowdown in broader private capital markets, underscoring sustained investor confidence in the country's start-up ecosystem.

The report also highlighted the growing role of India's digital infrastructure in attracting investor interest, particularly in wealthtech platforms that cater to retail investors and the emerging mass affluent segment. Investment momentum was also strong in software and SaaS companies, particularly those integrating artificial intelligence into their offerings.

Artificial intelligence emerged as a key theme across sectors.

The report expects investment activity to focus on AI, deeptech, climate technologies, and industrial innovation in future. —*ANI*

ON RBI'S E-KUBER PLATFORM

The securities will be issued through an auction conducted on the RBI's Core Banking Solution platform, E-Kuber —*RBI*

States to raise Rs 18,159 cr via RBI SGS auction

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced that multiple state governments will raise a total of Rs 18,159 crore through the auction of State Government Securities (SGS) on 7 April.

The securities will be issued through an auction conducted on the RBI's Core Banking Solution platform, E-Kuber. The auction will include borrowings by several states, with varying tenors and structures, including both fresh issuances and re-issues of existing securities.

Among the participating states, Andhra Pradesh plans to raise Rs 2,200 crore through two securities with tenors of 12 and 25 years.

Himachal Pradesh will raise Rs 900 crore with a 10-year tenor, while Maharashtra will borrow Rs 3,600 crore through three securities worth Rs 800, 1,600 and 1,200 with tenors of 5, 13 and 23 years, respectively. Meghalaya will raise Rs 259 crore via a 10-year security.

Punjab intends to raise Rs 1,500 crore through security with a tenor of ten years. Rajasthan will issue three securities worth Rs 3,600 crore through a mix of fresh securities and re-issues. These include re-issuance of 7.33 per cent Rajasthan SGS 2031, issued on March 25, 2026. Meanwhile, Telangana will borrow Rs 3900 crore through 2 securities worth Rs 2,000 and Rs 1,900 with a tenor of 17 years and 30 years each.

Both competitive and non-competitive bids for the auction should be submitted in electronic format, officials of the bank said.

Individual investors can also place bids as per the non-competitive scheme through the Retail Direct portal

The results of the auction will be announced on the same day and payment by successful bidders will be made on 8 April. —*ANI*

'Equities to see less earnings impact if Iran war ends'

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

India's equity markets could see a limited earnings impact if the ongoing West Asia conflict ends, while the recent correction in stock prices has improved the reward-risk balance for investors, a report by Kotak Institutional Equities said.

The report noted that signals from the US regarding the Iran-Israel conflict, have raised hopes of easing tensions and stabilising energy supplies.

Kotak Institutional Equities said its base case scenario assumes the conflict may continue for a few weeks, but without causing long-term disruption to global oil infrastructure.

If the conflict ends within two to three weeks and oil supply conditions improve thereafter, the impact on Indian corporate earnings may remain limited.

Government actions have helped shield Indian consumers and businesses from the full impact of rising oil prices.

Despite the recent volatility, the valuations across several sectors have corrected, improving investment opportunities.

Market benchmarks have already seen a sharp correction. The report projects Nifty-50 earnings growth of about 17 per cent in FY2027 and 15 per cent in FY2028.

The report also flagged other risks for India's economy, including weather-related concerns and agricultural supply issues. —*ANI*

'EU-India FTA to boost India's competitiveness'

The EU-India FTA could have mixed sectoral implications for European industries, while creating competitive pressure in some segments—*AI IMAGE*

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Europe's economic outlook remains fragile amid global trade tensions and geopolitical risks, which could have ripple effects on India's trade and sectoral competitiveness, according to a new report by EY

A new report by EY on European Economic Outlook (March 2026) notes that trade policy changes, tariffs, and geopolitical uncertainties continue to shape economic prospects in Europe, potentially affecting global trade flows and competition with countries like India.

The report highlights that the recently announced EU-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) could have mixed sectoral implications for European industries, while creating competitive pressure in some segments.

It added that certain European industries could face stronger competition from India. "For example, minerals sector may benefit from improved access to production inputs, while clothing industry could face stronger competitive pressure from Indian producers," the report noted.

The report also flagged global trade tensions as a key headwind for Europe's economy. According to EY, tariffs introduced by the United States could dampen economic growth across the European Union.

For India, the report suggests that deeper trade engagement with Europe and rising competitiveness in sectors such as textiles could open opportunities amid global trade uncertainties. —*ANI*

15-20 CONTAINERS EXPORTED MONTHLY

Iran war disrupts snack exports from Bikaner

JAIPUR, 4 APRIL

The West Asia conflict has impacted exporters in Rajastan's Bikaner region, with shipments of popular food items to Gulf and European countries facing severe disruptions, traders said.

Bikaner, known for its namkeen industry, exports large quantities of snacks like bhujia, papad and spices and other products to the Gulf region and Europe.

However, the war has led to delays, rising freight costs and container shortages, affecting exports and imports.

Exporters said container movement has slowed significantly, with shipments that earlier took around 30 days now taking up to 60 days due to longer and safer routes being taken amid the conflict..

Import of key raw materials, such as palm oil and soybean, has also been affected, traders said.

The West Asia conflict has led to delays, rising freight costs and container shortages, affecting exports and imports —*REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE*

Rising petroleum prices have further pushed packaging costs up by 30-40 per cent, adding to the burden on manufacturers.

Exporters said the current period is crucial for the namkeen trade, as preparations for peak export season usually begin around this time.

However, uncertainty over delivery timelines and increased freight charges has forced traders to rethink their strategies.

Around 15 to 20 containers of bhujia, papad and namkeen are exported every month from Bikaner, along with nearly 60 containers of other goods. At present, much of this trade has come to a halt, with consignments worth crores reportedly stuck at ports or in transit.

Shipments from Bikaner are routed through sea to many countries, such as Iran, Iraq, Oman, the UAE, Qatar and Bahrain, as well as European nations, including the UK, Germany, France, Italy and Spain.

Traders warned that if the situation persists, it could have a significant impact on the city's export-driven economy, with businesses already grappling with rising costs and delayed payments. —*PTI*

LSG seek batting revival against confident SRH

HYDERABAD, 4 APRIL

- Mohammed Shami turned back the clock with a vintage new-ball spell alongside young pacer Prince Yadav, as the duo reduced Delhi to 26/4 inside the power play in their last outing

Lucknow Super Giants will need to step up their batting as they seek their first win of the season against an explosive Sunrisers Hyderabad in a tricky away IPL clash, here on Sunday.

SRH head into their first home game of the season brimming with confidence after rediscovering their batting mojo, hammering 226/8 to crush Kolkata Knight Riders by 65 runs at Eden Gardens.

Returning to Uppal, where conditions are expected to favour strokeplay in an afternoon game, only adds to the challenge for LSG.

With momentum on their side and home conditions in their favour, SRH will surely start as favourites, while LSG have a mountain to climb.

Despite making the playoffs in their first two seasons, the Sanjiv Goenka-owned side has endured a slump over the past couple of years, finishing seventh in identical fashion, and their campaign this time has not begun on a promising note.

Mohammed Shami turned back the clock with a vintage new-ball spell alongside young pacer Prince Yadav, as the duo reduced Delhi to 26/4 inside the power play in their last outing. But LSG failed to sustain the pressure in the middle overs, and another tactical call leaving out mystery leg-spinner Digvesh Rathi, their leading wicket-taker (14) last season came under scrutiny.

On what is expected to be a flat Uppal surface, it remains to be seen whether LSG persist without a frontline wrist-spinner. SRH, on the other hand, appear to have hit their stride after an opening defeat to defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the IPL opener. Their batting unit clicked in unison against KKR, with Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma returning to form at the top.The match starts at 3.30 pm. *—PTI*

Rizvi powers DC to 6-wicket win over MI

Rizvi misses out on his debut IPL ton

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Impact substitute Sameer Rizvi continued his red-hot form with another fine half-century as an all-round Delhi Capitals outclassed Mumbai Indians by six wickets in their first home game of the 2026 IPL season here on Saturday.

Chasing 163, the 22-year-old Rizvi (90 off 51 balls) took apart the MI attack with a fluent knock studded with seven fours and as many sixes. After suffering a top-order wobble for the second successive game, Delhi Capitals steadied through a 66-run stand for the third wicket between Rizvi and Pathum Nissanka, who scored 44 off 30 balls. Rizvi then added 78 runs with David Miller (17 not out) as the hosts completed the chase with 11 balls to spare.

Initially playing second fiddle to Nissanka, Rizvi shifted gears after the Sri Lankan's dismissal, taking on the bowlers with ease. The youngster smashed back-to-back fours followed by two towering sixes, including one over deep backward point, to plunder 20 runs off the 11th over bowled by Corbin Bosch. He continued the assault in the next over, whipping consecutive sixes off Mayank Markande to seize complete control of the chase. He was unlucky to miss out on his debut IPL ton, but received a standing ovation from the crowd when he was out. This was after Delhi Capitals bowlers dominated to restrict Mumbai Indians to a modest 162 for six despite stand-in skipper Suryakumar Yadav's patient half-century. Suryakumar anchored the innings with a 36-ball 51, hitting three fours and two sixes, while Rohit Sharma hit 35 even as other MI batters found it difficult in the middle.

Delhi's bowlers, however, kept things tight.

Delhi Capitals 164 for 4 (Rizvi 90, Nissanka 44, Chahar 1-20) beat Mumbai Indians 162 for 6 (Suryakumar 51, Mukesh 2-26, Axar 1-22) by six wickets.

—PTI

Shreyas Iyer fined for slow over rate vs CSK

Punjab Kings skipper Shreyas Iyer was fined Rs 24 lakh for maintaining a slow over-rate during his team's IPL 2026 match against Chennai Super Kings at the MA Chidambaram Stadium here. The last season's runners-up, PBKS, secured their second successive win, defeating five-time champions Chennai Super Kings by five wickets here on Friday.

CSK's biggest concern is their bowling: Gavaskar

Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar believes five-time champions Chennai Super Kings' primary concern is their bowling, urging the side to address it to revive their campaign. CSK have lost their first two matches of the season, including a five-wicket defeat to Punjab Kings on Friday.

Confident RCB eye 2nd win, CSK need bowlers to be strong

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

- RCB have that luxury. They have a settled top-order under the watch of Virat Kohli, who has kept himself relevant in the age of range-hitting with an impeccable set of skills

Royal Challengers Bengaluru will be highly optimistic about pulling off their second win on the bounce in IPL when they face Chennai Super Kings, who have been hampered by Sanju Samson's lukewarm start and a lack of strong bowling options, here on Sunday.

The Royal Challengers are well rested after their first game back on March 28 against Sunrisers Hyderabad, which they won by six wickets at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

That fresh mind and body apart, the RCB are an infinitely better side than their rivals now, a stark contrast from the past when the Chennaities were bustling with talent through their ranks.

Now, RCB have that luxury. They have a settled top-order under the watch of Virat Kohli, who has kept himself relevant in the age of range-hitting with an impeccable set of skills.

Rajat Patidar seemed to have found peace with his dual role of leading the side and giving meat to the RCB middle-order.

But it was in the bowling that RCB have massively improved. Once perceived as their Achilles Heel, the Bengalurians have turned the tide, adding some worthy names, and made their bowling immune to the vagaries of conditions.

The defending champions were expected to be hamstrung by the absence of Josh Hazlewood, but Jacob Duffy stepped in seamlessly, destroying the SRH top-order with a three-wicket haul.

He appeared to have struck a chord with the Australians, a connection that was evident in his bowling strategy as he troubled the Hyderabad batters with highly accurate short-pitched deliveries.

The script, rest assured, will continue this weekend too, but CSK would want a change in it.

But for that, the Chennai bowlers need to change their script. The match starts at 7.30 pm. *—PTI*

Aditi best Indian after second day at Aramco

LAS VEGAS, 4 APRIL

Aditi Ashok was the top-placed Indian golfer after the second round, even as Pranavi Urs and Avani Prashanth also made the cut at the Aramco Championship here. Aditi, a five-time LET winner, including Hero Women's Indian Open, carded 1-under 71 to move into the top 15 of the leaderboard. The two other Indians to make the cut are Pranavi (76-75) and Avani (75-76), both placed T-59 on the leaderboard with a score of 7-over par. However, Diksha Dagar was unable to make the cut due to a difficult second round where she carded six-over 78 for a total of nine-over par. She shot three-over 75 on the first day. Lauren Coughlin became the sole leader heading into the weekend.*—PTI*

Jessica Pegula reaches WTA Charleston semis

NEW YORK, 4 APRIL

Top seed Jessica Pegula once again fought back from a set down to reach the WTA Charleston Open semi-finals with a 3-6, 6-3, 6-2 win against Russia's Diana Shnaider on Friday. Defending champion Pegula has lost the first set in all three matches so far, but again dug deep to maintain her hopes of retaining the title. The world number five from the United States took two hours and 10 minutes to defeat 19th-ranked Shnaider, relying on a formidable service game that included eight aces. Shnaider battled well in the first two sets and broke early for a 2-0 lead in the final set, before losing six straight games. Pegula, chasing her second tournament victory of the year after winning the title in Dubai in February.*—PTI*

India gears up for Australia challenge in U20 Women's Asian Cup

PATHUM THANI, 4 APRIL

India will take inspiration from the spirited first-half show in their 0-6 defeat to Japan in the previous match when they take on another formidable side, Australia, in their second Group C match of the AFC U20 Women's Asian Cup here on Sunday.

India conceded just one goal in the first 45 minutes against formidable Japan in their opening group match on Thursday, before letting in five more in the second half.

The Young Tigresses have quickly shifted their focus to the Australian test, carrying forward key learnings from the Japan match while maintaining belief in their approach. For India, the focus remains on staying competitive, executing their game plan, and growing into the tournament.

Head coach Joakim Alexandersson emphasised the importance of mindset as the team regroups.

"The mindset is to move forward. I told the girls that we performed very well in the first half and were able to compete with a good team.

We just have to keep doing that," the Swede said. India showed encouraging signs in the opening match against Japan. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Splendid double for Advani, Chitra

LUDHIANA, 4 APRIL

Ace cueist Pankaj Advani played the big points well under pressure to edge out a fighting Pushpender Singh for a memorable double in his maiden pool Nationals here on Saturday.

In the men's final of the 10-ball pool event, PSPB's Advani scored a come-from-behind 11-9 win over his RSPB rival.

Later, fellow Bengalurean Chitra Magimairaj rallied splendidly to overcome Neena Praveen of Tamil Nadu 6-4 in the women's final to complete an impressive double.

The men's final was a match of small margins. Although Pushpender got off the blocks in a rousing manner, Advani, who annexed the 9-ball title a few days ago, fought back splendidly to draw level at 3-3 in the race-to-11 affair.

The title clash turned decisively in favour of Advani in the 16th rack.

Pushpender seemed on course to make a break, but missed a regulation pot of No. 8 to let Advani draw level.

Advani punished another error from Pushpender in the next rack to go up for the first time in the final at 9-8. A poor Pushpender break in the 18th rack allowed Advani to go up 10-8. *—PTI*

Bangkok Para Archery: Payal Nag stuns Sheetal for gold

BANGKOK, 4 APRIL

India's rising para-archer Payal Nag, a quadruple amputee, delivered a sensational performance at the World Archery Para Series in Bangkok on Saturday, defeating reigning world champion Sheetal Devi, the world's first female limbless archer, 139-136 to clinch the women's compound open individual gold in her first senior international appearance.

The final began on an even note, with both archers tied at 54 after the opening two ends. Payal, however, found another level as the match progressed, producing three composed ends to open up a decisive gap and secure a memorable victory.

The outcome was all the more remarkable considering Sheetal's dominance over the past year. The 19-year-old has been in exceptional touch, earning global recognition after a stellar 2025 season. She continued that form in Bangkok, topping the qualification round with a superb 698 (25X), finishing well ahead of Kazakhstan's Zhanat Aitimova. Payal had earlier qualified third with a score of 678 (9X).

Shyam bags bronze

Shyam Sunder Swami secured a bronze medal for India after edging past senior teammate and Paris Paralympic bronze medalist Rakesh Kumar in a closely-fought playoff at the World Archery Para Series here.

Swami prevailed 143 (10*) to 143 (9) in the bronze medal match of the compound men's individual event, with the contest being decided on a tie-break after both archers were locked at identical scores.

A mixed team bronze winner at the Paris Paralympics, Rakesh ended his campaign in fourth place following the heartbreak in the shoot-off.

In the W1 women's individual event, Anjum Tanwar also finished fourth after going down 2-6 in her bronze medal match. *—PTI*

HAALAND SCORES HAT-TRICK

Man City run riot against Liverpool

LIVERPOOL, 4 APRIL

Liverpool were thrashed 4-0 at the Etihad Stadium as Manchester City won yet another FA Cup quarterfinal in the early kickoff on Saturday. An Erling Haaland hat-trick and a deft Antoine Semenyo finish saw City get the result their dominant performance probably deserved.

The opener came after Nico O'Reilly cleverly turned away from a lunge from Virgil Van Dijk to win a penalty in the 38th minute. Haaland duly converted, sending Giorgi Mamardashvili the wrong way. With almost the last touch of the second half, Haaland then made it two with a thumping header off a whipped Semenyo cross.

It was to become worse for Liverpool in the second half when Semenyo made it three with a deft little chip over Mamardashvili after being sent through by Cherki in the 50th minute. Seven minutes later, Haaland thumped one in off the crossbar to finish a glorious team move to complete his hat trick. In the process, he became the first Manchester City player to score a hat trick vs Liverpool in 89 years since Eric Brook's hat trick at Anfield in March 1937.

Liverpool had their moments most notably through Mohamed Salah - but failed to capitalise on any of their chances. *—PTI*

STAWELL GIFT

Richardson and Coleman advance to SFs

STAWELL, 4 APRIL

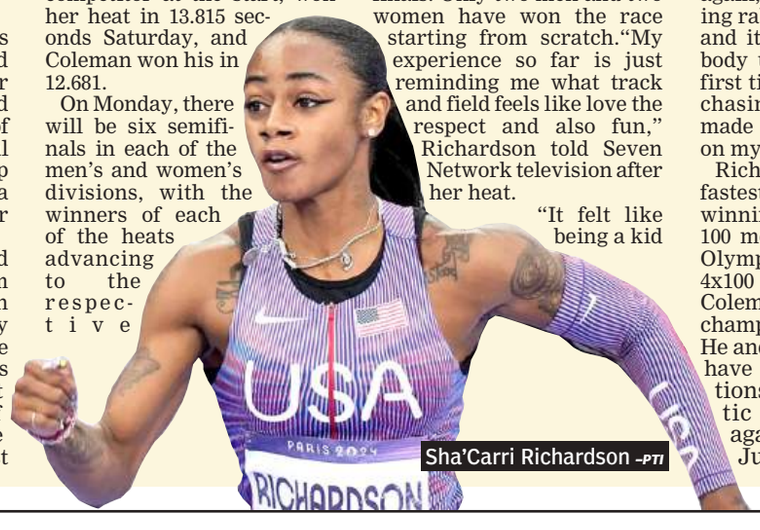
American sprinters Sha'Carri Richardson and Christian Coleman won their heats Saturday and qualified for Monday's semifinals of the Stawell Gift, an annual race contested on handicap over 120 meters on grass in a small Australian town near Melbourne.

Both Richardson and Coleman are racing from "scratch" in the 144th edition of the event, meaning they must run the entire distance and chase down opponents who, in some cases, may start up to 25 meters ahead of them. Richardson, who gave away 10 meters to her closest competitor at the start, won her heat in 13.815 seconds Saturday, and Coleman won his in 12.681.

On Monday, there will be six semifinals in each of the men's and women's divisions, with the winners of each of the heats advancing to the respective finals. Only two men and two women have won the race starting from scratch."My experience so far is just reminding me what track and field feels like love the respect and also fun," Richardson told Seven Network television after her heat.

"It felt like being a kid again, playing tag, like playing rabbit. I had a great time, and it just kind of woke my body up with this being the first time running in 2026 . . . chasing everyone actually made me activate and work on my race pattern."

Richardson is one of the fastest women of all time, winning a silver medal in the 100 meters in the 2024 Paris Olympics and gold in the 4x100 relay that same year. Coleman is a former world champion over 100 meters. He and Richardson appear to have continued their relationship despite a domestic violence charge against Richardson last July. *—PTI*



Sha'Carri Richardson –PTI

Football rally in Peru leaves one dead and dozens injured

LIMA, 4 APRIL

At least one person died and 60 others were injured in what seemed to be a crush of fans at a popular soccer team's stadium in the Peruvian capital, authorities reported.

Police said officers on Friday night rescued people trapped as a result of the influx of Alianza Lima fans in the south stands of the Alejandro Villanueva Stadium the night before their team's scheduled game against their biggest rival, Universitario.

Earlier, the Ministry of Health had reported the collapse of a wall inside the stadium. Both the police and Alianza Lima denied this in separate statements.

Fire brigadier Marcos Pajuelo said there was at least one fatality and dozens of injured people who were taken to hospitals in the capital. He said they don't know the cause.

Videos broadcast by local television stations showed a large crowd of fans in the south stands amidst an explosion of fireworks. Other videos showed apparently injured people sitting in the stands inside the stadium. *—PTI*